

*national
association
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studies*

NAES

ETHNIC STUDIES REVIEW

Shifting Identities

2005
Volume 28
Issue 2

The National Association for Ethnic Studies

Ethnic Studies Review (ESR) is the journal of the National Association for Ethnic Studies (NAES). ESR is a multi-disciplinary international journal devoted to the study of ethnicity, ethnic groups and their cultures, and inter-group relations. NAES has as its basic purpose the promotion of activities and scholarships in the field of Ethnic Studies. The Association is open to any person or institution and serves as a forum for its members in promoting research, study, and curriculum as well as producing publications of interest in the field. NAES sponsors an annual spring conference.

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ESR

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The Journal of the
National Association for Ethnic Studies

Volume 28, Issue No. 2

Winter, 2005

Shifting Identities

Editor: Otis L. Scott

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EDITOR'S NOTES

W.E.B. DuBois in his classic, *The Souls of Black Folks* (1903) raised the seminal metaphysical question regarding identity formation in the United States. Countless other scholars, scholar activists, and just plain citizens since, have and are raising this historical interrogative. "Who Am I?" "Who are we?" "Am I not a woman?" These questions are formed in the crucible of racism's white hot heat. And in an important sense, raising these questions is an essential first step towards mounting opposition to those hegemonic forces which work to ascribe social identity. The articles comprising this issue of the *Ethnic Studies Review* again draw our attention to the recurring questions regarding the implications of identity formation.

Defining oneself has never been an uncomplicated act in this nation and in many nations on earth. It has been made even more complicated by the systematized role that color consciousness and gender discrimination have played in shaping the social order. In the final analysis, raising the metaphysical question is an attempt to establish one's claim to both an individual and a group identity; an identity free to shift and to take refuge and reform if desired. And to do so against powerful oppositional forces intended to maintain the race, ethnic, gender and social class status quo. Importantly and disturbingly, these statuses are maintained by rules and processes of divide and conquer. The following six articles, in their own way, add to the body of information and perspectives

in ethnic studies on the important subjects relating understanding the complexities of the metaphysics of shifting identities.

Marcia Alesan Dawkin's article, "In Search of a 'Singular I': A Structural Analysis of Passing," provides an interesting conceptual approach to understanding the phenomenon of "passing" among a select demographic group in the United States.

The article, "In Passing: Arab American Poetry and the Politics of Race," co-authored by Katherine Wardi-Zonna and Anissa Janine Wardi, examines the cultural history of Arab Americans and the quest for self identification. The poetry of Naomi Shihab Nye is used as a device for clarifying the complexities of identity formation among Arab Americans.

Andrew Jolivé's "Migratory Movement: The Politics of Ethnic Community (Re)Construction Among Creoles of Color, 1920-1940," examines how Creole communities, against pressures to conform, maintain and protect a mixed heritage identity.

In the article, "Reader Expectation and Ethnic Rhetorics: The Problem of the Passing Subaltern in Who Would Have Thought It?", Pascha Antrece Stevenson provides a thought provoking analysis of how María Amparo Ruiz de Burton's novel deals with the predicament of color consciousness and passing. In turn, Stevenson forces the question, does the ethnic writer have a broad, or more narrow, obligation when it comes to writing about matters relating to race and ethnicity?

Chong-suk Han's article, "We Both Eat Rice, But That's About It: Korean and Latino Relations in a Multi-Ethnic City," asks us to re-examine the race relations dynamics underlying the conflagration occurring in South Los Angeles after the jury verdict in the trial of the police officers charged with assaulting Rodney King. The author brings forward the under reported relationships between Latinos and Koreans in Koreatown.

In "Multiple Identities, Citizenship Rights and Democratization in Africa," 'Lai Olurode brings our attention to the complexities of democratization processes in Africa. This is especially the case given the histories of indigenous peoples subscribing to multiple and shifting identities.

Each of these articles approach the subject of identity differently. In common, each comments on how groups of human beings, often confronting terrific odds, attempt to carve out space for themselves where they can live as self identified beings.

Read on and ponder the challenges issuing from the circumstances presented in these discussions.

Otis L. Scott

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IN SEARCH OF A “SINGULAR I:” A STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF PASSING

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INTRODUCTION

It is easy to envision the socio-cultural phenomenon of passing as a relic of a bygone era, yet passing is markedly more. From a historical perspective, “passing-as-white” is a strategy of representation through which light-skinned, white-looking, legally non-white Americans attempt(ed) to reconcile “two unreconciled ideals:” their limited opportunities as non-white people in a segregated society with their idealized life goals as full American citizens (DuBois, 1903; Gandy, 1998). Recent scholarship on the phenomenon explains that passing is more than a masquerade. Passing can be accidental, incidental, or a committed lifestyle that is noted:

when people *effectively* present themselves as other than who they understand themselves to be...[and] when other people actually see or experience the identity that the passer is projecting, whether the passer is telegraphing that identity by intention or by chance (Kroger, 2003, p. 7-8).

“Effective passing” is a strategy that forces passers to culturally produce and persuade others of their whiteness to the extent

that acts of passing are accepted and authenticated (Ehlers, 2004; Mullen, 1994). More broadly, passing is a practice that sheds light on how individuals relate to social structure and questions the stability of racial identification. Although passing is a historical and contemporary practice that involves the intersectional relationships among nationality, race, ethnicity, class, gender, class, sexuality, historical era, and self-image, the representative anecdotes in this essay are taken from narratives and legal precedent dealing with middle-class, bi-racial (black/white), heterosexual American men during the early 20th century in order to investigate why and how they cut ties with their racial/ethnic communities and families.

To this end, this analysis employs Structuration Theory, legal precedent, and literary evidence. Structuration Theory explains that passers note a contextual diversity or dissonance at the macro level between the general white world of social activity and the general non-white world of social activity. Legal precedent describes why severing social contact and communication with racial/ethnic communities and social worlds becomes necessary for effective long-term passing. Literature describes how, often times, passers renounce their communities and families in search of a unified self narrative, referred to as a “singular I.”

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: STRUCTURATION THEORY

Giddens’s (1991) Structuration Theory provides an ontological framework for examining acts of passing as strategies for reconciling the natures and relations between individuals and social structures. As a theory developed within the context of modernity, an era marked by its official narrative of progress and by its suppressed narrative “of destruction, loss, and the terror of life without meaning” (Lemert, 1999, p. 23), structuration is designed to grapple with the tensions and dilemmas that constitute crises of self. These crises “on one level or another, have to be resolved in order to preserve a coherent narrative of self-identity” (Giddens, 1991, p. 188). Thus, Structuration Theory is understood as a method that recognizes instances in which macro and micro levels overlap and merge. With regard to acts of passing, this merger occurs at “the vast veil,” also referred to as the color line.

Acts of passing are the result of a crisis of self which, in the cases examined here, is resolved by realigning one's limited life chances as a black person with one's life goals of fully participating in mainstream American society.

Structuration Theory investigates how the concepts of action, meaning, and subjectivity are made meaningful, and how they relate to notions of structure and constraint (Tucker, 1998). The core concern is with recurrent social practices and their transformations. In other words, structures cannot be separated from human behavior, and larger circumstances can be changed by recursive routine actions. Day-to-day actions are imbued with agency, the power to make a difference in the world, because they can be altered at any time (Cassell, 1993). As such, individual actions carry the prospective capacity for bridging the gap between life experienced as it is in one's current social situation and life as it might be if one's situation were altered. In this paradigm, an individual's life chances are both structurally and personally determined (Gandy, 1998).

Structuration is defined as the production and reproduction of systems of social interaction involving four ingredients that combine to generate structured social practices: rules, resources, social actors, and actions (Cassell, 1993). Rules are the norms and values that govern appropriate social action. Resources allow individuals to exercise power by coordinating their actions with rules to achieve desired life goals (Giddens, 1991; Gandy, 1998). Skilled social actors are those who understand the contexts in which actions are appropriate and inappropriate. Actions are the recurrent and routine behaviors that are made meaningful within and able to alter structure.

Structures provide limits in terms of the rules and resources that labor recursively to instantiate and reshape society at the macro level. Structures provide limits that communicate appropriate and inappropriate behavior which can be employed to reduce ambiguities and increase levels of "ontological security" of individuals, whose identities may or may not be in states of crisis. An individual only feels secure to the degree that others accept him/her as a valuable social actor and his/her behaviors as rational and appropriate (Giddens, 1991, p. 191). The basic units

of measurement for an individual's ontological security are the recursive routine behaviors that instantiate structure.

The primary dilemma is that of fragmentation versus unification. Thus, the heart of Structuration Theory is concerned with unifying a vision of oneself with relation to the narrative of a dominant structure. Further, the theory has three dimensions: (1) to account for human agency and embeddedness of social institutions through routine behaviors; (2) to understand how subjectivity is inaugurated through the recurrent nature of action; and (3) to investigate the "ontological implications" of social practice and recurrence (Cassell, 1993; Giddens, 1991).

A STRUCTURATIONAL ANALYSIS OF PASSING

As applied to acts of passing, Structuration involves the power struggle through which passers make use of resources available to them in order to reach their desired life goals. Passing is a practice of unifying a fragmented self-identity, a practice in which risk is high and trust is fragile. It is a fundamental crisis of the self which underscores the point that a secure individual life cannot be detached from larger social systems and institutions. Through this lens passing can be interpreted as an attempt to seize control by interacting with, rather than avoiding, the external and often dangerous general white world of social activity. On the other hand, passing can also be interpreted as a response to "engulfment," in which the passer defies the encroaching dominant forces of the racial structure (Giddens, 1991, p. 190). Thus, passers are individuals who "feel deprived of adequate social mastery in a threatening series of personal and social environments" (p. 193). In order to transcend and achieve some sense of "ontological security," passers adjust their presentations of self and appear exactly as they perceive other whites do.

Passers undergo the painstaking process of developing the appropriate responses to both whites via acceptance and assimilation and blacks via separation and exclusion. They seek out and attempt to attain "active mastery" in which their survival is ensured by being able to navigate and triumph over the trials of a racially segregated life (p. 193). Active mastery of the lifestyle variations between black and white people is acquired

in terms of what Bourdieu (1984) refers to as “cultural capital.” Cultural capital represents the collection of non-economic forces which influence success such as family background, social class, investments in and commitments to education, and knowledge of the practices of various social groups. The concept of cultural capital brings available resources to individuals and communities by virtue of their social ties and the fungibility of such resources with economic capital into focus. Actors who possess extensive and diversified social networks and who have learned the “proper” manners can mobilize their actions toward attaining economic resources. Passers acquire cultural capital by getting to know whites intimately through the processes of taking in and bearing witness to “all of the mundane yet critical things that made up [white] lives” (Harris, 1993, p. 1711).

Cultural capital to aide the passing process is often generated in the workplace. Colleagues regularly engage in communication practices that force passers to encounter their subordinate social positions (Hughes, 1933):

I never knew they made a practice of saying such terrible things about us...putting it out that all of us are thieves and liars, or else diseased—consumption and syphilis, and the like...until I started passing and heard their conversations and lived their life (p. 52).

It is quickly learned that dissociation from blackness was a main mechanism of survival (Butler, 1993). Passers inhabit the “worlds within worlds that exist just beyond the edge of [white] awareness and yet were present in [whites’] very midst” (Harris, 1993, p. 1711). Passers tenuously position themselves at the edge of the color line in search of a “singular I,” a coherent and secure narrative of self-identity (Roth, 2000).

In this sense, the search for a “singular I” leads passers to alter the rules which regulate their interaction with the dominant system by changing their daily actions. Passers constantly negotiate their blackness, which cannot be detected or publicly exposed. Standing with one foot in the black world and the other in the white world, passers seek to resolve the dissonance between their perceived life chances on either side of “the vast veil” and their

desired life goals (e.g. financial security, physical safety, access to social institutions, dignified and humane treatment, and full participation in white American society). In this phase passers begin to experiment with multiple subject positions and to cross social and economic boundaries that are perceived as exclusionary or oppressive. In Hughes's short story "Passing" (1933), Jack, the protagonist, describes this feeling in the last letter he ever writes to his unnamed black mother:

But I don't mind being "white," Ma....It got me this job, Ma where I still get \$65 in spite of the depression...When I look at the colored boy porter who sweeps out the office, I think that that's what I might be doing if I wasn't light-skinned enough to get by. No matter how smart that boy'd get to be, they wouldn't hire him for a clerk in the office, not if they knew it....That's why I sometimes get a kick out of putting something over on the boss, who never dreams he's got a colored secretary (p. 52).

This fragmented self both transgresses and remains trapped by a biased black-or-white-only racial structure. As a legally constructed black person, yet a person of multi-racial heritage and perspective, the passer simultaneously sees the problem of the black world of "we" with its imposed ethic of submission and the white world of "they" with its imposed bigotry and limitation. The passer's crisis, the crisis of developing a "singular I," is resolved by reducing contextual diversity and increasing ontological security by performing the routinized actions that make crossing the color line possible.

Such actions are daily routines including: what vacant seat of the train one occupies on the way to work, what job one holds, the area of town in which one resides, the social clubs or groups to which one belongs, where one dines, with whom one communicates, and to whom one refers as family and friends (United States Supreme Court, 1895; Giddens, 1991; Hughes, 1933; Roth, 2000; Harris, 1993; Kroger, 2003; Graham, 1999). Most striking is the realization "that blacks—not whites—are the ones who can threaten...security" (Graham, 1999, p. 382). These daily activities are the stepping stones of the passing process and

are instantiated within the context of a black-or-white-only racially biased structure.

This structure consists of the rules (laws) plus actions (everyday routines and internalization of structure) plus resources (cultural capital and skin color) plus actors who trust that they will morph into the dominant structure as variables in the recursive equation (passers). The law provides the rational impetus for acts of passing that fit the legal model of whiteness. This is not to say that acts of passing are solely practiced and made meaningful within a culture whose laws, customs and habits are based on racial segregation. Passing can be practiced in a variety of circumstances for a host of reasons—i.e., investigative reporting, entertainment, interracial or homosexual romance. An understanding of passing in the context of early 20th century American segregation law and discriminatory events reveals that laws are as much reflective as constitutive of these events. Further, such an understanding reminds the critic that issues of ownership, labeling, and appropriation are core aspects of self-identification. Next, the laws that surround racial labeling are examined to understand why passers cut ties with the African American community at large.

HISTORICAL AND LEGAL RATIONALES FOR SEVERING TIES.

The Supreme Court's transcript from *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1895) demonstrates why passers cut ties with the black community in general. Although passing was used by Homer Plessy as a strategic action aimed at eradicating racial discrimination, at trial passing was deemed a problem of appropriation (Robinson, 1994). The court transcript defines passing as the act of appropriating a reputation of whiteness in order to achieve desired life goals or "special treatment" as a black person. Thus, in order to lay claim to "the reputation of belonging to the dominant race, in this instance the white race, [which] is 'property,' in the same sense that a right of action or of inheritance is property," (p. 6) passers could in no way afford to be associated with non-passing blacks; not even on the same car of a public train. The mere intimation that a passer was not legitimately white could throw his/her entire world out of orbit. Passers considered it necessary to cut ties with the African

American community at large in order to avoid being spotted and outed as a black person and in order to appropriate the whiteness denied them at birth.

In order to understand passing as an issue of appropriating a legal model of whiteness, it is necessary to understand the legal model of blackness. For, as Frantz Fanon eloquently explicates, "not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man" (1967, p. 110). The racial classification of "black" denoted a mixed legal status lying somewhere between property and humanity (Harris, 1993, p. 1719). This mixed legal status is reflected in the Constitution, individual state mandates, and the "one drop rule." For purposes that benefited white people only, black people were included in the United States Constitution as three-fifths of a free person. This "Great Compromise," reflected in Article I, § 2, clause 3 of the Constitution, recognized blacks as assets who yielded their owners vast benefits with regard to issues such as political representation, taxation, commercial regulation, domestic tranquility, state sovereignty, and interstate relations (Matthews, 2002). Giddings (1984) points out that the black mother was a serious obstacle with regard to being considered white also referred to as effective passing. As early as 1667, state statutes dictated that "[c]hildren got by an Englishman upon a Negro woman shall be bond or free according to the condition of the mother" (p. 37). This was related to the "one drop rule," which defined the race of a person of mixed descent "in the proportion of seven eighths Caucasian and one eighth African blood...was of the colored race" (United States Supreme Court, 1895, p. 1-2). To be considered legally white a person could not have any trace of discernable black blood. The fear of black contamination of whiteness, especially without visible trace, is further reflected in legal precedent:

In one decade the mixed bloods rose from one-ninth to one-eighth of the population, and...as early as 1663 a law was passed in Maryland to prevent English women from intermarrying with slaves; and, even now...laws against miscegenation presuppose...danger from that source (Harper, 1988, p. 228).

Thus, the children of black women, even if fathered by white men

and phenotypically white, assumed the subordinate legal and social status of their mother as black.

The lack of protection under the law and social stigma associated with blackness created the context for discriminatory events that set DuBois's vast veil into position as the color line. Acts of passing are frequently sparked by a social encounter in which the passer is made to feel different from whites, and is "shut out of their world by the vast veil" (DuBois, 1903, p.9). For instance, consider Roth's (2000) narrative description of his passing protagonist's, Coleman Silk's, humiliation as he goes about his Saturday afternoon routine and is called a "nigger" for the first time:

And...when he eagerly went off on Saturday with his roommate...and they stopped in Woolworth's to get a hot dog, he was called a nigger. His first time. And they wouldn't give him the hot dog. Refused a hot dog at Woolworth's in downtown Washington, on the way out called a nigger, and, as a result, unable to divorce himself from his feelings...In the segregated South there were no separate identities, not even for him...No such subtleties allowed, and the impact was devastating. Nigger—and it meant him (p. 102-103).

The passer first understands the veil/color line as a cultural barrier to life chances and goals. The feelings of anxiety and personal doubt produced by inhabiting the social status of "nigger" spill into and skew all of the passer's activities (Cassell, 1993). In order to achieve some sense of stability, or ontological security, the passer decides whether he will self-identify as black or white. The passers examined here chose to bracket out the aspects of their identities that are associated with blackness and to embrace the aspects of their identities that are associated with whiteness. Whiteness is interpreted as protective measure or insurance, a shield from degradation, external domination, and a line of demarcation with regard to privilege, protection, and full autonomous participation in white American society (Harris, 1993; Roth, 2000). In order to make life less insufferable whiteness is appropriated via acts of passing.

Historically, Jim Crow segregation laws that proscribed the

social and personal encounters between whites and blacks had three main effects: (1) the laws ensured their “separate and inherently unequal” social statuses (United States Supreme Court, 1954; Woodward, 1974); (2) the laws instantiated distinct social worlds that opened spaces of agency; and (3) the laws ensured that a passer could be called into question at any moment, even when he/she “entered a passenger train and took possession of a vacant seat in a coach where passengers of the white race were accommodated” (United States Supreme Court, 1895, p. 1). Recursive routinized activities, such as the seat occupied on a passenger train, are embedded in macro-level institutional rules of legal segregation. The case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* is important in this regard because Plessy, an outed passer, sued the railroad company who accused him of being black. Passers realized that they did not have to be legally white in order to take part in the socio-legal privileges associated with whiteness. However, they did have to fiercely protect their reputational interests in being regarded as white. This shows that law and public debate have a reflexive impact on self-identity and lifestyle.

Social researchers Conyers and Kennedy (1963) cite the primary rationale for passing as the desire “to secure equal cultural, social, and recreational advantages” and the secondary rationale as the desire “to secure economic advantages” (p. 218). In other words, though the economic impulse for passing is significant, on its own it is inadequate for explaining why passers take the physical and psychological risks associated with crossing the color line. Johnson’s (1912) *Ex-Coloured Man*, eloquently explicates this idea after witnessing the lynching of a black man:

All the while I understood that it was not discouragement or fear or search for a larger field of action and opportunity that was driving me out of the Negro race. I knew that it was shame, unbearable shame. Shame at being identified with a people that could with impunity be treated worse than animals (p. 191).

Hence, the decision to pass is motivated by a deliberate rejection of identifying with a social group whose lived experiences are so painful that they become unbearable. Passing is a representational

strategy whose objective is to achieve a “singular I” and a “fate to be determined not by the ignorant, hate-filled intentions of a hostile world, but, to whatever degree humanly possible, by [one’s] own resolve. Why accept life on any other terms?” (Roth, 2000, p. 121). Ultimately, passers wanted to be “human not raced,” that is, they wanted the privilege of whiteness (Dyer, 1997, p. 4). Becoming white greatly increased the probability of controlling critical aspects of life rather than being an object of domination. It can be concluded that the decision to pass is triggered by a difference in perceived life chances on the other side of the color line.

LITERARY EXAMPLES OF HOW PASSERS SEVERED TIES.

Structuration Theory provides an account for severing kinship relations. Passers sever ties because they:

can no longer count on the presence of a network of kin to provide [them] with trustworthy companions [kin may out or otherwise associate passers with blackness]; at the same time [they] are freed from the necessity to provide such companionship to relatives whose company [they] find unrewarding (Cassell, 1993, p. 31).

A structurational analysis of passing involves a reflexive conception of self-regulation and a recursive concept of social structure. The passer is an object and a subject of history, an effect and agent of power, and entangled in an identity crisis (Foucault, 1976; Giddens, 1991).

Taking a cue from Giddens (1991) and Bourdieu (1984), passing narratives argue that the family serves as a microcosm of larger national structure, in which individuals internalize and enact structural ideology on a personal level. Thus, (re)situating the passing phenomenon within the merged contexts of macro level social and legal structures with micro level family and communal relations illuminates the sociological and historically-specific behaviors produced as a result of and in response to its practice.

Roth (2000) and Hughes (1933) provide cogent examples of the drastic measures passers undertook to protect their interests

in whiteness in a familial context. Namely, severing ties with their families by way of the black mother. As aforementioned, it is the socio-legal status of one's mother, as white or black, which determined one's socio-legal status. From a structuralist perspective, having a black mother constitutes one's place in terms of time-space and access to opportunity, particularly when passing means moving into a different spatial situation in which autonomous subjectivity is established (Giddens, 1991; de Certeau, 1984). Cutting ties with the family can be interpreted as the final stage of transition from the black to the white general world of social activity. From this perspective, passing is the decisive experience of a child's separation from the mother's body; a body that birthed the passer into a state of subjugation. Thus, the black woman as mother is revealed as the source of the passer's ontological insecurity. She:

remains in last place within the color/economic hierarchy, her disadvantaged status reinforcing the already existing prejudice against her. She is always a fly in the buttermilk, imagined as the least likely candidate for cultural assimilation, just as her dark skin would seem to make it less likely that she could reproduce white children or assure them a secure white identity. It is this woman furthest from whiteness who is therefore imagined as being also furthest from the advantages that whiteness has to offer (Mullen, 1994, p. 73).

Sadly, it is through this experience, this severing of the metaphorical umbilical cord, that passers inaugurate the space for the "singular I." This step is usually catalyzed by the passer's intention to marry a white woman and create white children. Once the obstacle of black motherhood is eliminated, the male passer stands free to become the patriarch of his own white family (Mullen, 1994). Cutting ties with the black mother allows the passing child to be reborn into the dominant majority.

Roth (2000) describes the moment when his passing protagonist, humanities scholar Coleman Silk, constitutes his "singular I" as a murder:

[M]urder the mother...that's what he saw he was

doing to her...Murdering her on behalf of his exhilarating notion of freedom! It would have been much easier without her. But only through this test can he be the man he has chosen to be, unalterably separated from what he was handed at birth, free to struggle at being free like any human being would wish to be free. To get that from life, the alternate destiny, on one's own terms, he must do what must be done (p.138-139).

At this exact moment, when Coleman disowns his mother, he exchanges his place as a black man for a place as a man in the white world. His journey across the color line is complete and he can proceed to use and enjoy his white reputation.

Hughes's short story, "Passing," provides another example that illuminates the moral dimensions and rules of racial passing. Hughes's protagonist, Jack, writes:

Dear Ma, I felt like a dog, passing you downtown last night and not speaking to you...It's funny I was the only one of the kids light enough to pass...I used to feel bad about it, too, then. But now I'm glad... I'm going to go ahead and get all I can out of life. Ma...I won't get caught in the mire of color again. Not me. I'm free, Ma, free! (Hughes, 1933, p. 51, 54)

In cutting ties with his black mother, Jack makes a final statement of his intent to live an autonomous and guilt-free white life. The tropes of freedom voiced by passers in these excerpts directly relate the rules of effective passing (i.e., acquiring cultural capital, cutting ties with racial/ethnic communities of origin) to destiny and necessity, agency and choice. These passers exercise agency as they choose to deny aspects of who they are in order to evolve into the free men they wish to become. These excerpts highlight the duality of structure: self-identities are social constructs and racially-defined institutions are constructs reinforced by individuals acting in line with their rules. The rules of effective passing as evidenced in the literature examined here entail abandonment of the African American family and community.

CONCLUSION

Acts of passing-as-white work both to knot and unravel the complicated ideological cords of race, identity, family, and democracy within the United States. A structurational analysis yields several observations: (1) that passing is a representational strategy and communication practice with rules and, consequently, appropriate and inappropriate language and behaviors that are affected by a racialized structure; (2) that passing engages the theorem of duality of structure. Recursive routine behaviors, such as occupying a seat on a passenger train in the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, constitute macro-level considerations at the same time that macro-level structures give specific meaning to routine behaviors; (3) that passing is a practice through which passers arrive at the sense a unified self-narrative, or “singular I,” by taking on rather than openly resisting the dominant white structure; and (4) that passing can be read as a process of piecing together the fragments of a shattered self, which is a project of control guided by the perspectives and dilemmas of the individual in the modern age (Giddens, 1991; Johnson, 1912). Consequently, passing sheds light on how race and ethnicity can be performed and examined contemporaneously. As a present-day phenomenon, passing emphasizes the contradictions of self-identity based on essential definitions of race and the deployment of such contradictions for a variety of goals, interests, and desires.

In summation, a structurational analysis of passing provides a more nuanced understanding of race as a shifting social structure that defines life chances and, in the case of effective passers in the modern era, encourages denial of one’s racial/ethnic cultural background and family. If the great problem of the twentieth century has been correctly identified by DuBois as “the problem of the color line,” then passing, as explored here, exposes the arbitrary nature of that line both then and now. Passing is a practice through which subjects appropriate the structures of racial demarcation in order to redraw the color line and to experience the “singular I” as full American citizen (DuBois, 1903; Roth, 2000). Passing can also be a strategy through which passers simultaneously criticize a black-or-white-only structure and attempt to be more truly themselves (Kroger, 2003). A structurational analysis focusing on the early twentieth century passing in the context of juridical,

political and cultural policies that demanded racial segregation unearths and destabilizes the ideological and epistemological foundations of race. Moreover, it provides a framework for identifying contemporary institutions, environments and social situations that brew the cultural drama that abets passing; whether it is along the lines of race, gender, sexual orientation, class or any other powerful social force. Most poignantly, a structurational analysis of the passing phenomenon attests to the history of the color line as a powerful structure of difference and a formidable obstacle to those who continue to find themselves, by accidents of birth, on the less fortunate side.

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IN PASSING: ARAB AMERICAN POETRY AND THE POLITICS OF RACE

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THE POLITICS OF PASSING, OR BEARING WITNESS THROUGH THE BODY

Incident #1:

Gulf War 1991—I am an undergraduate college student working part-time in an academic department. A male professor, whose wife is pregnant, is taken with my name, playfully singing its syllables and thrilled to tell me that his wife, too, agrees that they will name their baby girl Anissa. We banter about the uniqueness of my name and why it is just right for his daughter. Weeks later he asks in passing: “My wife and I assume that your parents just made up your name, right?” “No,” I respond, without hesitation, “it’s an Arabic name.” He stammers, his face reddens, and he stutters, “What? But you’re not; you couldn’t be.” “Yes,” I say, “I am. My father was Iraqi.” He avoids me for the rest of the semester. We never talk of my name or of his baby girl again. I learn later that they name her Emily.

Incident #2:

Gulf War 2003—I am a professor at a Catholic university who must somehow face my students and colleagues the day after President Bush wages what I perceive to be an unjust and immoral war against Iraq. I am speaking to a graduate student who recently converted to Islam. She covers, and is therefore marked as “other” in the West. A faculty member rapidly approaches us only to turn to the student with concerns: “I thought about you all last night through the bombing. Do you have family there? Is everybody okay?” The student explains that her family is not Arab; they are living in America and many of them are supporting the President’s decision. As an American of Iraqi decent, I stand motionless: alone, erased, silenced and passing.

Racial passing has a long history in America. In fact, there are manifold reasons for passing, not the least of which is to reap benefits—social, economic and legal—routinely denied to people of color. Passing is conventionally understood to be a volitional act that either situationally or permanently allows members of marginalized groups to assimilate into a privileged culture. While it could be argued that those who choose to pass are, in a sense, race traitors, betraying familial, historical and cultural ties to personhood,¹ Wald provides another way of reading passing, or “crossing the line,” as a “practice that emerges from subjects’ desires to control the terms of their racial definition, rather than be subject to the definitions of white supremacy” (6). She further contends that racial distinction, itself, “is a basis of racial oppression and exploitation” (6).

Underlying Wald’s argument is the slipperiness, unreliability and instability of race as a category of identity, arbitrarily assigned to the physiognomy of bodies that conform to racial taxonomy.² While W.E.B. Du Bois’ prescient prediction that the problem of the 20th century is that of the “color line” is irrefutable and has, in fact, extended to the 21st century, the basis for this discrimination is the existence of the social category of race and not some transcendent notion that race is a biological given. Numerous scholars have undermined essentialist notions of race; however, as Browder argues, “Race may be a construction, but color remains a visual cue; and most Americans use visual, physiological cues to make

their judgments about a person's racial identity. The constructions of racial and ethnic identities have the psychological weight of reality" (9). While it is not our intention in this essay to reify race as an essential category of selfhood, we do contend that racial distinction continues to signify in direct and often totalizing ways, and thus Arab Americans' fraught history of racial classification underlies the politics of their current negotiation of racial registries in America.

Arabs have been classified within the racial rubrics of the United States government as "white" since 1978, despite, as Majaj cogently argues, being "popularly perceived as non-white" ("Arab-Americans and the Meanings of Race" 320).³ It should be noted that Arabs have not always been categorized as "white" in America. An examination of immigration laws and the experiences of Arab settlers illustrates the instability of the Arab population's racial position, one that Samhan concludes is best understood as "not quite white" (209). This is echoed by Joseph, in "Against the Grain of the Nation—The Arab," who argues, "[t]o be white has been understood historically to mean being of European extraction. . . . Arabs are represented in the media as not quite white and not quite colored" (259). The current white status bestowed on Arabs, while legal, is, for many, considered "honorary." In the 19th century, Arabs were classified as originating from "Turkey in Asia," and later Arabic speaking immigrants were classified en masse as being "Syrians" who were often designated as Asian.⁴ In fact, Arabs began petitioning the courts to be considered "Caucasian" and not "Asiatic," presenting "historical and genealogical evidence of the Syrians' Caucasian origins" (Samhan 216).

Arabs from the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century were caught in a liminal racial position, many considered non-white and others deemed "white" solely based on the color of their skin and not on a national policy: "judges were more likely to deem lighter-skinned applicants worthy of naturalization, and to deny naturalization to darker-skinned immigrants even when attributing rejection to other reasons. For instance, applicant Faras Shahid, described by the court as 'walnut or somewhat darker than is the usual mulatto,' and applicant George Dow, described as 'darker than the usual person of white European descent' were

both initially excluded from naturalization, while applicant Tom Ellis, described as Semitic but 'a markedly white type of the race,' was admitted" (Majaj, "Arab-Americans and the Meanings of Race" 322).

This reliance on racial physiognomy was articulated by a South Carolina judge in 1914, who ruled in the context of a citizenship hearing, that "although Syrians might be free white persons, they were not 'that particular free white person to whom act of Congress [1790] had donated the privilege of citizenship,' a privilege he ruled was intended for persons of European descent" (Samhan 217). This position is by no means unique; there were numerous court cases in the early and middle twentieth century in which judges alternately and arbitrarily defined Arabs as white and non-white: "At stake in the cases were these questions: whether Arabs are "white" in color; whether Arabs are Asian or Caucasian; whether whiteness is determined by race, color, geography, culture or religion; and whether there is an intrinsic connection between Caucasian identity and whiteness" (Majaj, "Arab Americans and the Meanings of Race" 322). Here, it is clear that Arabs' white status was first and foremost contingent on racial physiognomy. Indeed, the South Carolina judge mentioned above reasoned that "[i]f an applicant from Syria cannot rest on complexion, he must find other grounds . . . to establish any community of race with the European races assuming those last to be the white race" (Majaj, "Arab Americans and the Meanings of Race" 322).

While by no means an exhaustive history of Arab racial classification in America, these cases are presented to underscore the problematized racial identity of Arabs in America, a tension that is acutely significant and trenchant in today's climate. Beset with wars, questionable foreign policy decisions and acts of terror committed on both sides of the ocean, Arab Americans' simultaneous identification as American and not American, white and not quite white, confounds group identification with other communities of color and complicates the dynamics of passing for this population.⁵

Joanna Kadi, editor of *Food for Our Grandmothers: Writings by Arab-American and Arab-Canadian Feminists*, argues the following about the position of Arabs in the West: "Not Black. Not White.

Never quite fitting in. Always on the edge" (xvi). Because Arabs occupy an in-between space of racial identification, Kadi contends, "In the United States and Canada, it is not only white people who refuse to see us, it is other people of color—Latinos, Africans, Asians, Natives—who do not acknowledge our existence" (xix-xx). African American poet June Jordan provides an important exception to Kadi's feelings of exclusion in communities of color. Jordan, who visited Lebanon in 1996, offers the following: "I went to Lebanon because I believe that Arab peoples and Arab Americans occupy the lowest, the most reviled spot in the racist mind of America. I went because I believe that to be Muslim and to be Arab is to be a people subject to the most uninhibited, lethal bullying possible" (qtd. in Saliba 304). Reviewing the video of the Israeli bombings at Qana, Jordan offers a striking analogy to African American experiences, claiming that it is the "Rodney King video of the Middle East" (qtd. in Saliba 304). In this way, Boudakian's "Crossing Over to the Other Side" printed in Kadi's anthology, reveals a homecoming in choosing to identify with women of color from whom she received "unequivocal support" (36) for what she regards as her process of mental decolonization: "Cultural bleach is a force in white supremacist U.S. mainstream culture, wherein light-skinned people of color are urged to consider ourselves physically, historically and ideologically white. Resisting cultural bleach is a refusal to participate in this kind of assimilation and instead to affirm who we are" (35). While Boudakian does not share Kadi's sentiment of liminality, in both positions self-fashioning is a complicated process, fraught with historical, cultural and racial markers. Arab American writers, while exploring these identity issues, bear witness to their histories and political struggles regardless of how they situate themselves racially in America.

As the epigraphs reveal, passing is not only confined to chosen acts of racial disguise, but is often projected onto bodies that do not adhere to protocols of racial or ethnic classifications. Given the instability of racial categorization and the prevailing stereotypical assumptions about Arabs, many Arab Americans unintentionally pass for non-Arab in America.⁶ Mohja Kahf's "*Hijab Scene #5*" explores the manifold issues surrounding unintentional passing and the problems of Arab racial classification. The speaker enjoys

community with African American men only when covered: "When you're wearing *hijab*, Black men / you don't even know materialize / all over Hub City / like an army of chivalry, / opening doors, springing / into gallantry." Here, Islam is implicitly conflated with communities of color, for when the speaker marks herself as a Muslim she is regarded as an ally, acknowledged as a sister. However, the speaker's affiliation with the African American community is transient: "Drop the scarf, and (if you're light) / you suddenly pass (lonely) for white." These final two lines reveal how the Arab body may not disclose racial identity; rather, such identity may be manifest through external markers. Despite a lighter skin tone, the speaker positions herself as a person of color, who merely "passes" for white. That the word "lonely" is placed in a parenthetical allows for a dual reading, as the speaker not only passes for white, but her default position as white leaves her bereft of community, excluded from the majority culture and from communities of color. This poem articulates that, more often than not, members of the Arab American community are faced at some point with inadvertent passing.

African American performance artist Adrian Piper, whose physical features do not disclose her race, has adopted a unique approach to handling her own inadvertent passing by distributing cards that read: "I am black. I am sure that you did not realize this when you made/laughed at/agreed with that racist remark." The card continues by explaining that Piper tried early on to alert white people to her racial allegiance, which often resulted in people regarding her as "'pushy, manipulative, or socially inappropriate'" (qtd. in Wald 4). This act of public performance reveals the nexus of concerns associated with racial identification: it is arbitrarily assigned by governmental agencies; it is a foundation of overt and implicit social interaction and it is a burden or responsibility. While not intending to pass as such, Piper's routine social interactions reveal that she does pass for white and is subject to racist remarks. It is here that race moves from a biological to a social category. Regardless of bloodlines, family or heritage, it is in these moments that Piper chooses to identify herself politically as an African American.

Likewise, Arabs, who often unwittingly pass, routinely consider

the politics of whether or when to “out” themselves, perhaps not as “white” (which, again, they are legally defined), but as Arabs, a loaded signifier in this particular historical moment. The representation of Arabs as “essentially different and not comprehensible to the Western mind” (Joseph 258) is widespread and has a long history in America. Throughout the nineteenth century, the Arab was considered incapable of becoming Americanized. In 1899, a Boston social worker described Arabs as inherently “other”: “Next to the Chinese. . . who can never be in any real sense Americans, the Syrians are the most foreign of all our foreigners. Whether on the street in their Oriental costumes, or in their rooms gathered around the Turkish pipe, they are always apart from us” (Shakir 43).

Since the late 1960s, specifically following the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, the profoundly exotic image of the Arab has transformed into a far more sinister portrayal. The popular stereotype of the Arab is of a villain, who is encoded as male. The Arab male, so readily apparent as the embodiment of evil (or as the axis of evil, as it were), functions to tell us who “we” are: the “we are good” and “they are evil” dualism has currency in today’s culture. In a study of comic books featuring Arabs from the 1980s, in which “not a single Arab heroine or hero was featured,” Shaheen contends that the caricatures of Arab men fall essentially into three categories: “repulsive terrorist, the sinister sheikh or the rapacious bandit” who are “bestial, demonized and dehumanized” (123). Arab men are cast routinely as “anti-American, anti-West, anti-Israel, anti-Jewish, anti-Christian” (123). Arab women, depicted as “shadowy nonentities, swathed in black from head to foot” (Shakir 39), serve to reinforce Arab male brutality. Shaheen finds that the portrayal of the Arab woman is of a “faceless housewife, whose thick-set form is bundled in dark robes” and who is “voiceless, featureless and mindless” (129).⁷

Throughout the media, Arabs are now narrowly scripted as terrorists, madmen or religious fanatics, this latter term functioning as a euphemism for Islamic fanaticism:

Some political analysts have argued that Islam is the West’s new evil empire. Islam is frequently represented as a militaristic religion bent on jihad

(holy war), inherently and historically hostile to the democratic, Christian West. Islam's tenets often are represented as inscrutable. Adherents of Islam are frequently viewed as mindless, fanatic followers of mad clerics." (Joseph 261).

Despite the fact that the majority of Arabs in America are Christian, there is a conflation of Arabs with Islam, which Joseph considers "a religion of color." The stereotypes of Islam, then, are embedded in the West's cultural perception of Arab society (259, 260). These representations work to underscore the notion of the Arab/Muslim "other," who is, above all else, fundamentally not American. Because Arab Americans are a rather invisible minority,⁸ who do not have the political power that other groups in America enjoy, many Americans do not know Arabs or Muslims in their daily lives. Therefore, this "other" is understood through cultural representations, which rely today, as they did during the 19th century, on what Edward Said argues is an Orientalist gaze. He holds that "one of the principal dogmas of Orientalism is the absolute and systematic difference between the West, which is rational, developed, humane, superior, and the Orient or the East, which is aberrant, underdeveloped and inferior" (300). He further argues that, "without examining Orientalism as a discourse, one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage—and even produce—the Orient" (3). The concept of the "orient" was based on perceptions of racial otherness and difference. The insistence on creating and upholding negative stereotypes worked to justify wars, colonial expansion, and the exploitation of native peoples and resources. Orientalism continues today. Given this colonial history, and the fact that Arab Americans have been a silenced and invisible minority in America, it is perhaps easier for monolithic characterizations to circulate without a great deal of reaction or protest. Recognizing their status as "terrorists" and the feared embodiment of otherness—in short, recognizing that they are "the enemy" in this time of war—there are numerous reactions to inadvertent passing, but the shared responsibility for not bearing witness to family and heritage can result in feelings of guilt.

Naomi Shihab Nye, arguably one of the best-known Arab American poets, writes poignantly of an incident of inadvertent passing in a theater in England. During intermission, a woman sitting next to Nye, without provocation, confided to the Palestinian American poet “‘You know what’s wrong with the world today? It’s Arabs. I blame it all on the Arabs. Most world problems can really be traced to them’” (“Long Overdue” 128). A stunned Nye is silenced, questioning the randomness of the older woman’s vitriol. Though Nye had time to respond to the woman—“to find a vocabulary for prejudice and fear”—she remains immobilized: “I could have said, ‘Madam, I am half Arab. I pray your heart grows larger someday.’ I could have sent her off, stunned and embarrassed, into the dark” (“Long Overdue” 129). Replaying and textualizing this racist encounter and highlighting her silence, Nye discloses the guilt she feels for passing: “Oh I was ashamed for my silence and I have carried that shame across oceans, through a summer when it never rained, in my secret pocket, till now. I will never feel better about it” (“Long Overdue” 129). This episode from Nye’s life suggests the dual roles that voice and body play in the contestation of white supremacy.⁹ When the body fails to signify, when the body “passes,” voice can mitigate corporeal silence.

BEARING WITNESS THROUGH THE WORD

While Arab Americans have had a long history of publishing in America, Arab American writers from the latter half of the twentieth century in contrast to earlier Arab American writers punctuate their writing with issues of passing, racial identity, voice and political affiliation. These second and third generation writers, according to Majaj are “embedded in the affirmation of ethnicity popularized in the 1960s and 1970s” (“Arab American Literature and the Politics of Memory” 267).

It should be noted that “[w]ithin the Arab- American literary scene, there is much more poetry than fiction” (Akash and Mattawa xiii), and numerous reasons are hypothesized for writers’ penchant for this genre, not the least of which is the relationship of Arab American writers to the Middle East. In the Arab world, oral performance of poetry is prized. The *Koran* exemplifies this

poetic tendency for while it is first and foremost the spiritual book of Muslims, it is simultaneously a text of striking verse, made more lovely by its oral recitation. Orfalea and Elmusa find that Arab American poets are responding to their forebears' connection to this verbal art form: "The great Arab love of poetry [has] not been drained from New World veins" (xii). They continue by stressing that Arabs' "love of poetry is native and deep" (xiii). Others argue that poetry is favored because it is a genre suited to both grief and celebration. Given the demonized position of Arabs in America, coupled with the pain and suffering of so many Arabs in the Middle East, it is fitting that poetry functions as a site of mourning and remembrance. The elegiac tone of their writing situates Arab American writers within a larger framework of stereotyped groups in America whose literary expression seeks, in part, to call attention to a history of oppression and a legacy of neo-colonization. Echoing in the poetry of Nye is pain and loss on a domestic, national and international scale. Indeed, the ease with which the Arab American poet moves from depictions of familial household rituals to American foreign policy underscores that poetry, unlike the body, can consistently bear witness to Arab American lived experiences, which, while certainly not monolithic, pose a radical alternative to routine images in the West.

Nye's introduction to her poetry collection, *19 Varieties of Gazelle*, works to apprehend the tragedy of September 11, 2001 by turning to poetry: "Writers, believers in words, could not give up words when the going got rough. I found myself, as millions did, turning to poetry. But many of us have always turned to poetry. Why should it be any surprise that people find solace in the most intimate literary genre? Poetry slows us down, cherishes small details. A large disaster erases those details. We need poetry for nourishment and for noticing, for the way language and imagery reach comfortably into experience, holding and connecting it more successfully than any news channel we could name" (xvi). Beginning her poetry collection with sorrow—a sorrow that millions of Americans, Arabs and Arab Americans share—reveals the shroud of loss permeating the collection. Through this opening, Nye announces her book as a text of memory that works to coalesce the community and give expression to its members' lives in the

face of tragedy. When Nye learns of the devastation of 9/11, she remembers the generosity and kindness of Arab men, including a “gentle Egyptian basket-seller” and an “elegant Arab man” who gave her twice the cloth she had paid for. She remembers Waleed, the restaurant owner, who cooked lentil soup for free for her son. It is these men, these quiet, gentle, generous men, who are effectively erased and silenced in the wake of such devastation, that Nye insists on naming, while never losing sight of the tragedy, a tragedy that she believes “Arab Americans must say, twice as clearly as anyone else, that we deplore” (xvi).

It is in these moments when Arab American writers proclaim “this is not who we are” (xviii) that our grief works to galvanize the community by rhetorically marking and quietly commemorating the lives of so many others: “the innocent citizens in the Middle East who haven’t committed any crime” and “who are living solid, considerate lives, often in difficult conditions” (xvii). In this way, memory is a powerful counternarrative, a political text that allows for a new paradigm of the Arab world. Narrating the lives of Arab men who routinely and effortlessly demonstrate acts of kindness and generosity, Nye offers another text of Arab masculinity that is antithetical to terrorism, violence and hatred.¹⁰ Nye’s father, her Palestinian father, is representative of her fusion of domestic and international politics. Throughout the collection, Nye’s father is presented as a figure of domesticity who tells stories to the neighborhood children, is slow to anger, serves tea with sprigs of mint, sings folksongs, plants fig trees in the middle of Dallas, Texas, leans over the stove to boil Arabic coffee and dreams of his childhood in the Old City of Jerusalem.

Nye’s grandmother, who lived to be 106, is a recurring figure in her poetry, but Arab men, emblemized by her father, are a touchstone of her work. So while Zoghby’s argument that Arab American poets return to the family and especially parents as poetic subject matter provides a useful paradigm for reading Nye’s work (22), her recurring reference to the father is perhaps more nuanced, for it is through the father’s body that Nye is Arab.¹¹ It is noteworthy that Nye, in recounting the racist incident in the theater, thinks of her father, wondering, “what would he say back to her?” (“Long Overdue” 129). Nye recalls her father at this

moment partly because her shame at not speaking and confronting this woman could be understood as a betrayal of her father, a Palestinian who seemingly would not have the same facility at passing that his daughter does. Inadvertent passing, then, carries with it the recognition that others cannot pass and the attendant feelings of guilt for temporarily abdicating ethnicity.

Pairing the father's voice with her silence points toward the tension around language in many of Nye's poems. As a poet, language is her medium, yet it is often the inability to find speech—a weighty silence, a wordlessness—that marks Nye's Arab poems. Arabic is defined as the language of pain and suffering in the poem "Arabic." As the man with the "laughing eyes" tells Nye, "'Until you speak Arabic, / you will not understand pain'" (19 *Varieties*, 90) Nye, though, does not have full access to her father language: "I admit my / shame. To live on the brink of Arabic, tugging / its rich threads without understanding / how to weave its rug. . . I have no gift" (91). Because she believes her "gift" of language is stunted by her inability to speak Arabic fluently, she cannot speak its pain, cannot be its witness. However, by the poem's end, the speaker admits to "feeling sad" and responds to the man, "I'll work on it" (91). Nye's desire to "work on" expressing the pain of her people, to find a language that articulates their suffering, remains a site of longing in her work. This is exemplified in "The Man Who Makes Brooms," as the speaker is haunted by voices, pleading, "'speak for my people'" (19 *Varieties*, 18).¹² Ironically, in this poem featuring the quiet gestures of the broom maker—"thumb over thumb, straw over straw"—Nye is speaking for her people. Occupying his small space, where there is "barely room / for baskets and threads," the broom maker remains. In this subtle treatment of place and ritual, Nye highlights the constancy and dignity of the man's work as a stance against Palestinian displacement.¹³ His work is holy simply because it continues. Significantly, the broom maker does not speak; rather, it is his gesture, to which Nye gives language, that invokes pain and loss. Nye understands the man's gentleness not by word, but by action. While she is outside of the broom maker's language, Nye can nonetheless speak his story. In fact, her marginalized status in America and the Middle East provides her with a lens with which read the universality of suffering.

The final image of “Arabic” is of the speaker hailing “a taxi by shouting *“Pain!”* Although the poem withholds the language the speaker uses to hail the cab, it is significant that “the taxi stopped / in every language and opened its doors” (91). Nye’s travel from America to Palestine, suggested by the movement of the taxi, indicates the transportation of pain. That all languages equally call the taxi, all nations sharing pain, is a metaphor for Nye’s work. “All Things *Not Considered*” emblemizes this interconnection. In this poem, Nye chronicles the suffering in Palestine, where both Palestinian and Jewish people are murdered in the name of “holy land.” Here, where “everyone hurts in similar ways,” the speaker asks, “In what language / is this holy?” (*19 Varieties*, 133). Nye suggests that adhering to a particular language, an ideology, detracts from the ability to appreciate the collective language of humanity. Despite her intimate connection to the Arab world and her insight into its people’s ongoing oppression, Nye’s poetry arcs towards a larger conceptualization of reconciliation and compassion.

The recurrence of humane Arab men in Nye’s writing does not work to romanticize nostalgic visions of a patriarchal Arab past, which, as Majaj rightly argues, can be a problem in Arab American literature, in which some authors conflate the beautiful land of the Middle East with women and those who tame it and preside over it as male (“Arab American Literature and the Politics of Memory” 275). Rather, given the decidedly gendered discourse in the West around the Arab “enemy,” it is “he” who Nye seeks to confront textually. This is a political act of textual resurrection, and not a wistful turn for Nye, who is herself American and therefore is not longing for an Arab homeland in the same way as first generation Arab American authors might. Bearing witness to her ethnicity in her poetry and prose necessarily encompasses bearing witness to her father and other Arab men: “There is no one like him and there are thousands like him—gentle Arab daddies who make everyone laugh around the dinner table, who have a hard time with headlines, who stand outside in the evenings with their hands in their pockets staring toward the far horizon” (“Letter”).

Nye’s poetry does not decorate acts of violence, whether committed by fundamentalists or those working under the

auspices of the Israeli government and with financial support from the United States.¹⁴ Nye does not anesthetize the pain of living in refugee camps where children are gunned down and mothers are left to mourn for the missing. In this way, the back cover of *19 Varieties of Gazelle*, features an older Arab man, standing near to what appears to be his grandson and holding a large picture of his adult son, seemingly missing or dead. The text, then, is bracketed by sorrow and bereavement. It is significant that our final image of the collection is of a family of Arab men, out of focus, looking lost. Bereft of the son/father, the picture reads poignantly as a tableau of loss, an image without explanatory text that starkly reveals the pain of mourning.

Likewise, in her open letter to "Any Would-Be Terrorists," Nye mourns the losses of September 11th; she directly confronts those who would commit such acts and admits to being "furious" and "humble" in her country's pain. Significantly, though, Nye employs the language of family throughout the piece: she claims to feel "closer to you than many Americans could possibly feel" and labels herself their "distant cousin," whose intimacy is manifest in a shared understanding of food. She urges them to not only think of the pain they caused so many in America (including Arab Americans who bear this double burden), but also the detrimental effects that this act has had on American foreign policy in the Middle East. She empathizes with the pain that triggered such action, but again implores any "would be terrorist" to "tell us in words" of their broken hearts. Returning to her familiar call for language, Nye writes, "Read Rumi. Read Arabic poetry. Poetry humanizes us in a way that news, or even religion has a harder time doing. A great Arab scholar, Dr. Salma Jayyusi, said, "'If we read one another, we won't kill one another.' Read American poetry." Paralleling the men's pain with America's, Nye's anger never devolves into a demonization of Arab men. Rather, her plea to read poetry and to understand that Americans do not make their government's foreign policy decisions indicates that killings and other barbarous activity are not isolated to September 11th; rather, as she asserts, "the rest of us will try harder too."¹⁵

It is perhaps in this piece where "us," "we" and "they" blur and where Nye identifies at once as an "Arab cousin" and "American

neighbor”—claiming the landscape of heritage and of birth—that she fully bears witness to her bicultural identity. In short, Nye is both “us” and “them.” Rhetorically claiming her Palestinian heritage, she concludes with the line: “make our family proud.” Closing thusly, both *19 Varieties of Gazelle* and “Letter from Naomi Shihab Nye,” with rhetorical and visual markers, return the reader to family, kin and bloodlines. Despite her ability to “pass,” Nye’s use of corporeal metaphors underscores her material connection to her father and the Middle East.¹⁶ Nye’s body of work, in fact, substitutes for the body, itself; it is a testimonial to her Arab heritage, marking the self through the word.

BEARING WITNESS THROUGH THE NAME

Incident #3: Seven weeks ago I gave birth to my son. Being a quarter Iraqi, he will surely pass. When or how he claims his Arab ancestry and whether it will hold the same political weight in years to come is uncertain. As his mother, I struggled with naming. Should I “mark” him as an Arab American? Will language be a gift of heritage or a burden? My son’s name carries the map of family, a loving gesture to his Iraqi grandfather whom he will never know, yet it deliberately allows him to pass in his country of birth.¹⁷ As a friend of mine assured me, choosing a name that goes “both ways” is a survival strategy in a political climate in which Arab Americans are seen by many as the “enemy,” fear for their safety, are targeted by governmental authorities, are routinely denied civil rights and are victims of racial profiling and hate crimes.¹⁸ Yet there is still guilt. I feel guilty for passing on so many occasions knowing my father could not, for wanting my son to have the ability to pass in America and for the recognition that many people of color, including Arab Americans, cannot. Like Nye, this gesture of naming is an attempt to bear witness through the word.

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FOOTNOTES

¹ African American literature abounds with passing narratives which, as James Weldon Johnson’s *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* epitomizes, often position the protagonist as abdicating family and disavowing community for nothing more than “a mess of pottage.” A close reading of Johnson’s text, though, illustrates that it is the fear of bodily harm—in this case a brutal lynching—that compels the narrator to assume a white identity and move north. The novel, finally, lays blame at the feet of white America for creating a racial climate that induces an African American man to sell “his birthright.” Again, racial passing is portrayed not as a necessary act of survival, as the unnamed protagonist’s friend Shiny has chosen to devote his life to racial uplift, but as a complicated negotiation of race in the early 20th century.

² The desire to racialize bodies according to a racist mythology is exemplified in a Georgia hospital where nurses were instructed to discern babies of

indeterminate race through a “series of procedures posted on the nursery wall. . . among them a procedure to measure the size of its genitals” (Derricotte 182). Despite the medical setting, racial stereotypes prevail and are elevated to scientific truth.

³ Numerous Arab American authors problematize Arabs’ white status: “In the United States, we are socialized to believe that Middle Eastern identity is nebulous and liminal, or a European subculture. In actuality the ‘Middle East’ represents a group of ancient West Asian cultures” (Boudakian 36). Likewise, the title of Laila Halaby’s poem, “Browner Shades of White” illustrates this dilemma as the speaker states that she feels “erased” by government forms. She further addresses the bifurcation in her own life: “My friend who is black / calls me a woman of color. My mother who is white / says I am Caucasian” (205).

⁴ In the nineteenth century, Syria, also known as “greater Syria,” encompassed areas of modern day Lebanon and Syria.

⁵ Classifying Arabs as “whites” also delegitimizes their racial oppression, which they continue to suffer. Therefore, this is not merely a discursive argument, but has material ramifications. ADC, the America Anti-Discrimination Committee, the largest Arab American civil rights group, urged its members to fill out the U.S. census long form with its question of ancestry in order to begin the arduous process of visibility.

⁶ Because Arabs are not a recognizable racial/ethnic group in America, not only do they often go unidentified, other people of color, most notably Indians and Pakistanis, are routinely misidentified as Arabs and often suffer anti-Arab harassment.

⁷ When not cast in the role of the submissive house slave, Arab women are constructed as the “scantly-clad and salivated-upon belly dancer” (Shaheen 129). While seemingly antithetical to the oppressed, covered woman, both are objectified and more significantly, provide evidence for Arab men’s perceived inherent misogyny.

⁸ Joanna Kadi refers to Arabs as “The Most Invisible of the Invisibles” (xix).

⁹ Toi Derricotte, a light-skinned African American poet, writes of a similar incident of inadvertent passing with a taxi cabdriver, on whom she had come to rely. After several rides, the man, believing his passenger to be white, makes a racist comment. Derricotte’s reverie allows for multiple ways of reading this moment—she believes that her racial position provides her with a stronger sense of voice: “We fought all the way to the airport. And it felt good. It was wonderful to be able to fight him without constantly have to get out of the way of the racism in his mind. That’s when I realized that it is much easier for white people to confront racism than it is for blacks” (173-174). Derricotte willingly disrupts the simplicity of this seemingly race-free moment, though, as she goes on to reveal that after telling this story at a black college, a woman confronted her: “She said for me to escape the pain while others are not able to made me a betrayer” (174). Here, Derricotte admits that silence “is just as ‘wrong’” (174) and she finally tells the cabdriver of her race and ceases riding with him.

¹⁰ Likewise, Mohja Kahf’s “I Can Scent an Arab Man a Mile Away” presents a

loving, though not romanticized portrait of Arab masculinity. While they may be “macho, patriarchal, sexist, egotistical, [and] parochial,” they are also tender and refined, cushioning the “tumbles of small children” and recognizing “Scripture and poetry.” Arab men are also the site of sexual desire in Kahf’s poem: “God, they look so sexy in those checkered scarves.” The speaker infuses the *kafiyya*, a garment regarded by the West as a sign of danger, with erotic power, and in so doing deconstructs monolithic notions of Arab masculinity.

¹¹ Zoghby further contends that, in Arab American poetry, memories of parents are “rivalled only by concerns with oppression and violence in the Middle East” (22), a claim that is true of Nye’s work as well.

¹² Language is a chord sounded throughout Nye’s collection, yet a poem such as “Lunch in Nablus City Park” vacillates between the import of voice and its inability to capture the materiality of Palestinian lives: “When you lunch in a town / which has recently known war / under a calm slate sky mirroring none of it, / certain words feel impossible in the mouth.”

¹³ Gregory Orfalea argues that “The Man Who Makes Brooms” is one of Nye’s best “protest” poems (58).

¹⁴ In fact, her father’s family lost its home and possessions in 1948, when the state of Israel was created.

¹⁵ Unlike Nye, many Arab Americans are fearful of critiquing American foreign policy decision. In many communities or businesses that are decidedly marked as “Middle Eastern,” i.e. grocery stores, markets, and restaurants, there were a number of prominent flags, ribbons and other patriotic symbols that appeared in the wake of September 11th, 2001 and the subsequent war in Iraq. These overt signs of American patriotism may be read as another form of passing, as some Arab Americans attempted to highlight their American identity and downplay their ethnicity, recognizing the conflation of Arabs and terrorism in the West. While a significant number of Americans vocalized their opposition to the war, many Arabs feared revealing a dissident political position and publicly attempted to “pass” through hyper-patriotic expressions.

¹⁶ It also suggests Nye’s affiliation with her brother, whose body signifies ethnicity: he “looks more like an Arab than many full-blooded Arabs do” (“Letter”). Many Arab American writers employ the language of kin: Suheir Hammad writes, “please god. . . don’t let it be anyone who looks like my brother” in response to the September 11th attack (qtd. In El Said 202).

¹⁷ “Arab Americans from all groups—recent immigrants, assimilated immigrants, or native born—may choose to deny their ethnic background. Abu-Laban and Suleiman pointed out that some Arabs never reveal their ethnic background because of stereotyping. They give as an example the consumer advocate, Ralph Nader, who has seldom (if ever) referred to his Arab lineage” (Nobles and Sciarra 187). Of course Nader’s ability to pass is due, in large part, to his Americanized name. Naming, then, is another form of passing. Like other immigrant groups, some Arabs have anglicized their surnames. Indeed, before my father immigrated to the United States, a cousin who had lived in the West advised him to change his surname from Al-Wardi to Wardi. A more recent trend, though, is Arab Americans anglicizing their first names in the public arena

and using their Arabic names only in the home and other safe spaces.

¹⁸ Arab American children, too, recognize the climate of fear. In the days following September 11th, Nye reveals that her brown-skinned nephews have yet to return to school ("Letter"), and Elmaz Abinader in "Profile of an Arab Daughter" writes, "My brother's son asks my sister do you think someone will try to kill my dad?" (qtd. in El Said 205).

MIGRATORY MOVEMENT: THE POLITICS OF ETHNIC COMMUNITY (RE) CONSTRUCTION AMONG CREOLES OF COLOR, 1920-1940

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INTRODUCTION

This article considers the social and economic conditions under which Creoles of Color left the state of Louisiana from 1920-1940.¹ Because Creoles in the years following 1920 were legally reclassified as black, many lost their land, social and legal rights, and access to education as well as the possibility of upward mobility to which they had previously had access when they were accorded the status of a distinct/legal ethnic group. Creole families had to make decisions about the economic, social, religious, and cultural futures of their children and the community as a whole. As a form of resistance to colonial and neocolonial rule, thousands of Creoles left Louisiana, following the pattern established by members of the previous generation who had anticipated the advent and implications of the new legal racial system as far back as the mid to late 1800s and had engaged in the first wave of migration from 1840-1890, moving primarily from rural ethnic enclaves to larger urban cities within the US and to international sites such as Mexico, Cuba, Haiti, Brazil, and other parts of the

Caribbean and Latin America where racial lines were more fluid (Gehman, 1994).

This essay addresses the second wave of Creole migration which begins around 1920 and ends in the 1950s. I will focus primarily on the twenty-year span from 1920-1940, demonstrating that a detailed analysis of the material and cultural conditions in Louisiana during this period is essential to understanding how reconstruction, Act 220, and segregation led to Creole migration and community reconstruction in the form of ethnic enclaves. Also essential to an understanding of these phenomena is a critical evaluation of the ideology behind “passing,” which reveals an underlying political, racial, and economic project that both denies white and black racism and results in the marginalization of mixed race, hybrid, mestizo populations. Consequently, I will devote considerable attention in this article to a critical discussion of acts historically considered as ethnic “performativity” and ethnic “authenticity.” Finally, I will examine the meaning of *home* for Creoles living within the diaspora both in and out of Louisiana, and explore how the travel between Creole enclaves outside of and within Louisiana, along with the economic support provided by migrating Creoles to family members that remained, mirrors the patterns of transnational and diasporic communities globally.

ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND RACIAL PUSH FACTORS

The 1920s brought about an economic decline in Louisiana that sent the state literally spiraling into abject poverty. The ramifications of the post-slave economy and Jim Crow segregation were heaviest on Creoles of Color, because they stood to lose the most as a result of the change in their racial status from Creole to Black. Because of the drastic changes under reconstruction, political power—in the form of voting—was not exercised in the way that it once had been by the Creole of Color community. As anticipated, registration—particularly among blacks—declined precipitously. The number of whites on the rolls statewide dropped from 164,088 to 91,716 in 1904; black registration simply collapsed, falling from 130,344 to 1,342. Although the number of white voters slowly climbed as the state population increased, and especially after women began to register under the Nineteenth Amendment (ratified in

1920), black registration in Louisiana, as elsewhere, shriveled even further. Only 735 Louisiana blacks were listed on the rolls in 1918, at the same time there were 144,832 registered whites, still below the 1896 level. Black registration fell to its lowest point in the twentieth century in 1922, when exactly 598 black voters were listed in Louisiana compared with 191,789 whites, including women. As late as 1940 only 886 Negroes were registered (Wall, 1984: 235).

The socially engineered decline in voting and voter registration among blacks is one way in which the African American community has historically been disenfranchised. Creoles, who became a part of this category in 1920, were faced with the realization that, to continue to make a life as they had known it, they would have to leave Louisiana. This was true even during a brief period in the early 1920s when the newly-emerging oil industry began to boost the suffering Louisiana economy, since opportunities for work were given on a priority basis to whites; in any case, this brief period of economic prosperity in the state was short lived and worsened at the end of World War I.

By 1920 a modern petrochemical industry was rapidly developing in Louisiana, with Baton Rouge, Monroe, Shreveport, and Lake Charles its centers. Abundant supplies of fossil fuels stimulated expansion of utilities, pipelines, railroads, and water transportation. This economic upturn created thousands of new jobs, not only in the new industries themselves, but in construction, service occupations, retail sales, and state and local government. Rural Louisiana nurtured the coming political revolution. The artificial markets created by World War I sparked a cotton boom that sent prices up to 36 cents per pound by 1918. But the postwar depression knocked prices down again, and by the 1920s, Louisiana's farmers were again impoverished, in debt, and in a rebellious mood (Wall, 1984: 239-240).

One parish in particular was hit by the disparity of life in the 1930s and 40s. Frilot Cove has always been isolated and self-contained. Most people owned their land and supported themselves with farming. However, from the late 1930s to the early 1950s, numerous residents left farming for more lucrative jobs in northern cities like, Detroit and Rochester, NY. Many of

these same emigrants returned home to Frilot Cove when they retired (Billeau, 1998:20 from the Creole Center Archive Records).

Although many scholars in the twentieth century observe that Creoles maintained much of their distinct culture, others have only analyzed this in the context of black-white relations and have reduced the Creole experience as multiracial to an issue of “passing” for white or being “authentically” black. The presumption that Creoles who are white in ancestry (in many cases more white than black and more Native American than either) are ‘passing’ for White seems a curious position, when culturally and socially speaking the same could be said of Creoles who pose as ‘authentic’ members of the Black community, when culturally and ancestrally it could be argued that some members of this population are historically less related to blacks than they are to whites and Indians.

The lack of power came hard to a population that prided itself on its accomplishments: owning property, paying taxes, and working hard to move through the higher educational system. These ethical considerations are still reinforced by the Creole family, their church and community to this day. According to local Louisiana Creole activist and scholar, Terrel Delphin, “denial of black status, that is to say “powerlessness”, (as constructed by the ideology of white supremacy) was a necessity to maintain Creole identity. Acknowledging it has been necessary too, and in spite of the fact that historically many, if not most, Creoles could have left their region and drifted into the mainstream as whites, most chose to stay together even in distant places.”

We left Louisiana in groups. First my uncles came out West in the late 40s and early 50s and then my dad and finally we came with my mama on the train. We could have passed for white and some of us did, but not me, not my brother and my other sister. Maybe it's cuz' we're the oldest, and the oldest can remember. I remember what it was like to not be black, to not be white, and to not be able to really talk about being Indian. People didn't know what Creoles was...so I had to tell them. We spoke

Creole at home. We ate Creole food. I think we were a mixed family, lots of culture, lots of Creole traditions like on Christmas and Easter...and I passed some of these things to my kids (Creole Interview Respondent).

Creoles have traditionally taken care of one another; kinship ties offered a tool for that, brokering jobs and security for those who left Cane River. Attitudes about Cane River, almost nostalgic on the part of the first generation to leave, tend to draw them back. Many left in the 1930-1960 period, but virtually all of them kept their connections. Most moved to cities: Chicago, Los Angeles, Houston, New Orleans. Rural life experiences rapidly turned into nostalgia (Delphin, 1995: 15). These Creoles formed bonds in new places because they had ties to other Creoles who had already migrated and established a community network among other Creoles.

COMMUNITY PRESERVATION AND RECONSTRUCTION THROUGH RITUAL

One Los Angeles lady I interviewed recalled, "My daddy thought Louisiana was heaven. He talked to us about it all the time." Whatever the motivation, people came home. "Christmas, Easter, other feast days, not to mention funerals, weddings, birthdays and the Fourth of July– almost any excuse set people visiting." The Church Fair in October and the Fourth of July rounded out secular holidays. The Fourth of July correlated with the old *Fete du Ble* or corn fest, a first fruits ceremonial time celebrated by Native Americans in Louisiana. Whatever the origin, it was a good time to visit. Travel from Isle Brevelle to Chicago, or even Los Angeles, was commonplace. Isolation was certainly not geographic. By the 1950s, frequent cross-country trips were common, and they remain so today (Delphin, 1995: 15).

Reunions and la-la's or dances were the ways that we got to see our people who were from back home. But so see here in the North...we saw family at church, at school, and at socials. You knew who was Creole just by the name or the look and sometimes you'd meet a cousin (cou-saan).

Visiting is something we often did. Sundays after church were a great time for visiting. There'd be food, gossip, and plans for birthdays and holidays. We'd get to talk about how people back home were doing and could send them things if they needed. In the 60's, I think '67 or '68 we went back to bury my na-nan. It was special because we felt like we had never left. I'll go back someday. I wanna be buried there too, its home for me (Creole Interview Respondent).

This travel back and forth between the Creole homeland and various locations within the Creole diaspora not only indicates a pattern of revolving migration and national travel, but also reveals the distinct ethnic identity maintained by Creole communities that continues to be tied to Louisiana and the ethnic specificity of being multiracial. Creoles could have easily blended into multiple ethnic communities across the United States as many did do during the first wave of migration to Mexico in the nineteenth century, but most, it seems, chose to be true to their ethnic and cultural distinctiveness, by not denying any portion of their ancestry.

Sister Frances Jerome Woods (1972) noted the tendency of Creoles to settle together mostly in northern cities close to Catholic Churches and in some southern cities, but especially in Houston. She attributed that to the fact that they had an easier time in Houston where they blended with Mexicans and other dark-skinned people. Creoles amicably explain such settlement patterns by the fact that they went to places where they had relatives, people to help them, to broker jobs and resources (Delphin, 1995: 15). As a result of the marginalization faced by Creoles after the implementation of new laws that prohibited them from having their own ethnic category, Creoles made the decision to reconstruct and reconfigure Creole communities across the United States in the image of the homes they knew in Louisiana.

Many Creole families migrated from Louisiana to California in the 1940s lured by work, including, the Ravare, Landry, Francis, Patin, Bordenave, Ganier, Laurent, Metoyer, King, Beridon, and Fredericks families. Many of these consisted of master brick masons. Once in California they continued to form colonies as in Louisiana and worked and played together. The art and expertise

continued to be passed from generation to generation as was done before the Civil War and after the 20th century migration (Ravare, 1998: 24, Creole Center Archive Records).

The evolution of new Creole enclaves in the 1920-1940 period suggests a form of cultural articulation and agency that can only be manifested through a deconstruction of a priori conclusions about the stability, and fixed, closed categories of group identity. Scholars of the Creole community have tended to produce this effect in their overemphasis on the Creole perspective from a New Orleans hegemonic perspective, ignoring the differences in the Creole population in urban versus rural spaces. The project of radical contextualisation is straightforward and arcane. Many of the old binaries are subverted because neither abstraction nor empiricism (in knowledge production), neither theory nor practice (in political action), neither universalism nor relativism (in aesthetic judgments), can resolve any of Kant's three foundational questions of philosophy: what do I know, what should I do, what do I want. The answers to these questions depend upon abolishing the a priori and determining the grounds on which they are made, accepting that the traces of historicity and spatiality are always a constitutive feature of the processes of the subject and object formation (Keith, 2000: 532). Creole communities successfully produced ethnic enclaves that speak to the philosophical questions raised by Kant. Creole were Creole because of what they did and not simply because of what people told them they were.

My parents were from the Lake Charles area. They both went to Xavier University. They knew their Creole culture. They studied it. They grew-up on it... in the fields, at the family gatherings. They told me stories about how Creole people came to be and said that we kids should never be ashamed of who we are and that being Creole isn't about denying who we are, it's about embracing and celebrating our many faces and colors. "Society will tell you otherwise" my papa use to say, "but young lady keep your head up, look them in the eye, and tell them who you are, tell them you and your kin are Creole people" (Creole Interview Respondent).

SUBVERTING THE RACIAL BINARY OF BLACK -WHITE PERFORMATIVITY

As Creoles moved toward this space of ambiguity and cultural continuity, their representation to the external world of whites and blacks (especially in Louisiana) caused ruptures in the binary thinking that was established from 1865-1920. One interviewee commented on the ramifications of this period.

But what we have to do as a people whether its Creole, Black, Indian, is stick together...we're all the same. I use to have to run home after school during those times. I wasn't running with the White folks, but I couldn't be with the Black folks because they wouldn't accept me. Because I was too light. I had to fend for myself more or less until like I said, I went to high school. Cuz' I remember this girl who lived across the street in the Valencia Gardens named Ana, she use to run me with a rug knife (Creole Interview Respondent).

The aftermath of this period has led to the “shaming” of Creoles who *refuse* to pass for black only or white only, for a third space ethnic identity which is inclusive not only of white and black, but of Indian as well (see figure 1.1). To this day anyone who has a trace of African blood in their ancestry is considered adamantly-forced by both the white and African American population in general-to be Black. Any deviance from the total acceptance of Blackness and/or any outward identification with and/or highlighting of the French or Indian part of our racial composition is widely frowned upon by both African Americans and Whites (Sarpy, 2001: 58).

Figure 1.1

Creole Migration Ethnic Identity Options

CREOLE	INDIAN	SOME OTHER RACE
WHITE	BLACK	

“Again, it was important for many to be Creole as opposed to exclusively white, Mexican, Negro, or Native American-any of the groups which could have, and occasionally did, accept them as individuals. Rather than to “passer,” the Creoles tended to perpetuate and maintain their group identity wherever they went” (Delphin, 1995:16 Creole Center Archive Records). Creoles living within these new urban locations scattered nationally throughout the United States and worked to embrace all of the components of their ethnic and cultural make-up, but as is evidenced by the lack of scholarship on the Native American contributions to the development of contemporary Creole culture, one could deduce the conclusion that this aspect of the culture was denied and erased through calculated, legal, economic, and sexed/gendered practices. Consider the following respondent’s comments about historical inaccuracy:

There’s a lot of races in those swamps there. I’m sure he was blind to it. But they were never interviewed. There was a linguist, who was married to Mary Haas.

He was working on the Chitimacha and she was working on the Tunica and they found a Black man who spoke Chitimacha, what I hate is he probably also spoke Mobilian, but they didn't know that, but he did become one of their Chitimacha informants. But he's one of the few people who they talked to about Blacks and Indians. Nobody much talked to Mexican/mixed people (French/Indian Interview Respondent).

These historic moves of erasure cause a slippage between the reality of lived experience and ethnic identification as a socially ascribed status. The assertion for example, that tribes such as the Atakapa in southwest Louisiana are "completely" extinct, speak to the erasure of this group's ability and of Indian identity in general, to continue to exist in mixed race communities, such as that of the Creole.

These descendants of the Atakapa suffered great neglect, along with other minorities, through all of the prior two centuries and the first half of the 20th century. They were denied their racial identity. And they were denied civil rights and adequate schooling, along with African Americans according to anthropologist and linguist, Hubert Singleton.

The Indian children were denied completely the remnant knowledge of their people's history, culture, and language. Even at Lake Charles, where the Smithsonian had preserved these "Creole" people's Native American language and had pleaded that the language be studied and appreciated, local authorities appear not even once to have offered its study to these Atakapa descendants. The author himself attended a Lake Charles public school in the 1930s with scores of children who, like him, were "Creoles" of Atakapa ancestry. Never once was he told by the school about his people's own language, history, and culture. Simply they were never mentioned (Singleton, 1999:58, Creole Center Archive Records).

The aspects of the culture that are however, indigenous to some degree have continued to be practiced by Creoles all across the Diaspora. The issue however, is to what degree do these Creoles know which aspects of the culture are Native American and which are not. As with all American Indian communities, issues of the loss of language speakers in younger generations and cultural patterns of life are changing and sometimes blended with mainstream culture to form a cultural hybrid. The loss of power after the passage of Act 220² left many Creoles searching for ways to resist and reform laws. Several legal cases disputed laws that segregated Creoles from the white populations and caused Creoles to live in greater numbers among the African American communities of Louisiana.

Hubert Singleton, a retired anthropologist and linguist who now resides in Hammond, Louisiana conducted a study of the Atakapa people and language that reveals many connections to the Creole people that would indicate that they are indeed the same people, but in a hybrid form. Southwest Louisiana and southeast Texas' pretense that the Atakapa language and people were extinct had a very damaging result in both states "As a result of both states' past and present policy of denying a people's very existence by every means possible, even by encouraging the use among them of name tags, now of clouded meaning, that really do not convey their Indian ancestry, thousands of so-called "Creoles", "Creoles of Color", and former "Coloreds" in and from southwest Louisiana and southeast Texas live confused about, and even ignorant of, their Indian heritage" (Singleton, 1999:58).

In the entire description of Creoles in the book entitled, *Creoles of Color in the Bayou Country* not once are the people directly described by the actual word "Indian" or "Atakapa", proper for many of them. This is what happens when a people's language goes extinct. Everybody, including many of the people themselves, lose sight of who they really are according to Singleton. However, they are indirectly or virtually described as Indians when that book relates Creoles of Color to customs and traits historically unique to Atakapas: the practice of healing, the dancing of Zydeco that from pre-history was the Atakapas' good-time dance, long association with Catholicism, clannishness, long history of dwelling on the

southwest prairies, a wide range of complexions, etc. (Singleton, 1999:58 Creole Center Archive Records).

The examples articulated by Singleton reveal important aspects of Creole culture that are influenced by one of their major American Indian ancestral groups, the Atakapa. Moreover, these traditions have been the fabric of some of the cultural practices that held Creole communities together during the second migration wave from 1920-1940. In urban spaces, the Zydeco dance and the Church have been staple forms of cultural persistence among Creoles. They have worked to preserve life as it was in Louisiana and in the process have imported, transplanted, and shared their rich cultural traditions with surrounding non-Creole communities. Catholicism, Zydeco music, and Creole cooking are the most known about aspects of Creole culture globally, because they have been regenerated by Creole enclaves throughout the United States and internationally.

Creoles are starting to be everywhere. On Oprah that author was there talking about her people from Cane River and the Creoles. Every summer kind of like the Indian Pow wow circuit there is a Zydeco dance and musical festival circuit throughout southern California, eastern Texas, Louisiana and many other states. Then you got Emeril who always cooks the good Creole food. But what folks don't know is the origins of these foods and dances and even the language. Some argue about the French and Spanish or white origin and others focus on the African with an after word usually about the Indians. The food, aspects of the dance, music and language are from the Indian and the merging with the others. Our one pot dishes and our soup and corn and vegetable dishes all come from the Indians in the area some Choctaws and Chickasaws in my family (Creole Interview Respondent).

The movement and travel of Creole culture has been possible because of the un-relinquishing efforts of Creole families, especially, Creole women, to subvert society's binary categorization of Creoles

as black or white, instead of both and more. The “more” that I speak of, is the seldom studied aspects of Native American culture. Creoles like other mixed-race American Indians experienced a form of ethnic renewal during the mid to late twentieth century, in part this renewal was because of a long standing history in which both Creole and Indian (and Indian as a part of Creole identity) ethnicity were made invisible.

RETENTION OF NATIVE CULTURAL PATTERNS WITHIN CREOLE ETHNIC ENCLAVES

The descendants of these populations have worked to maintain these classifications, but in the case of the Creole, it has remained especially important to not limit the identity to one aspect, even though evidence suggests a stronger American Indian and French presence than an African one. “Native American identity was the other alternative. In the first generation, some of the Metoyer family was descended from a *Cannechi* woman, an old-eighteenth century term for Apache slaves in Louisiana, and a part-white, part-black father” according to St. Augustine Society Founder, Terrel Delphin. Still other families are easily traced to Caddo, Choctaw and Lipan roots. He goes to say, “So, in terms of race, they were more genetically Native American than either white or black. Consequently, Native American connections can be made for virtually every family. Still, most prefer identity as Creole... Like white (French or Spanish), black, Native American or Indian mixtures are easily acknowledged, but only as a part of the mix-Creole” (Delphin, 1995: 16).

As we have seen, Creoles have not only moved from their original homelands in the prairie parishes of southwest and western Louisiana for a better economic life, but have continued to preserve elements of all races, especially American Indian, in the maintenance of ethnic enclaves throughout the diasporic regions they inhabited during the 1920-1940 period. In the following section I will look at the ways in which notions of authenticity and performativity were played out once these Creole migrants reconstructed their communities in other cities.

PASSING, AUTHENTICITY, AND THE ARTICULATION OF THE POLITICS OF “PERFORMATIVITY”

It is important to think about the complexities of social action, movement, and interrelationships that exist between social, personal, and cultural axes of group identity. Throughout the twentieth century, sociologists have observed an interdependent relationship between personal and societal influences in the making of individual identity, especially as it relates to one's ethnic identity. For Creoles of Color, the 1920-1940 period, represents an era of shifting meanings for Creoles because they had reached a point where many could no longer thrive economically or culturally in Louisiana. The passage of segregation and anti-miscegenation laws continued to have severe effects on this population, so they began to leave the state of Louisiana in larger numbers than ever before, because of the ways in which they saw their own identities being tied to both social and cultural systems of control that would not allow them to continue to live as they had for nearly two centuries. The problems of identity for this generation did not go away easily however. As Creoles have been located within the Black community so too have they had to deal with similar social problems and discrimination. Consider the following school-age experience as re-told by a Creole:

Like at Everett I remember at the end of the school year they would have a thing called like “Grey Neck Day” that's where all of the Black folks would beat up on all the white folks (or the light skinned folks) and its still happening today, where society pits a light skinned Black person against a dark skinned Black person and vice-versa. You know and it's sad. I use to have to runaway, so I wouldn't get beat up. It was hard to be Creole at school, but it was always easy at home because we ate and spoke Creole culture (Creole Interview Respondent).

Noted sociologist, Talcott Parsons' work in the area of social action is important in (re) thinking and (re) articulating the experience of Creole migrants as they transitioned into new regional areas and retained identities and communities that were similar even with different physical environments. In part, I would

assert that Creole migrants were able to maintain Creole identities and practices, because the social and cultural systems under which they lived during the 1920s, 30s and 40s closely mirrored those same systems in Louisiana. As mixed race people they were able to seek out other mixed-race Creoles who whether family or friends would help them because they had being Creole in common. This type of kinship network as mixed-race people has not been talked about in recent scholarship.

According to Parsons, actors internalize meaningful order (a cultural system) that is more general than the set of social interactions (the social system) of which they are a part. This analytical argument means, on the one hand, that every social act specifies some broader cultural pattern; social action cannot be viewed mechanistically, for it inevitably has some cultural reference. On the other hand, because in analytical terms actions are also part of the social, not only the cultural system, the idealist perspective is also rejected. On the social system level, independent necessities are conceived of as coming into play, concerns about scarcity and allocation that cannot be deduced from patterns of meaning in and of themselves (Alexander, 1990:4). Thus for Creoles, social interaction and cultural systems of the meaning equally constitute the development and sustainability of their communities throughout the United States.

Because Parsons also posits the existence of a third analytical system-the personality-he can argue, moreover, that neither culture coding nor social determinism prohibits a role for the psychological imperatives. Action is symbolic, social, and motivational at the same time (Alexander, 1990:4). Creoles moving to northern U.S. states such as Michigan, New York, California, Missouri and Illinois reflect in their actions the sentiments of Parsons' theory of social action. The choice of choosing an ethnic identity as Creole and the notion of "performing" or "pretending" to be "white" as they moved to new locations can be seen as an example of the symbolic, social, and motivational all at once. Moreover, the actions of many were to retain a specifically Creole identity, while for others they decided to "become" Black and to a lesser extent, a great many lived as "Indians". My argument here is not to say that Creoles cannot live their lives as anyone of these ethnic groups

solely, rather it is to say that one must analyze the influences of social interaction on the choices that these various individuals and communities made and continue to make.

Creoles therefore, exercise a certain ability to observe and retain a specific type of knowledge that separates their culture from that of other ethnic groups in the United States. Knowledge among individuals and groups about definitions of ethnic identity are therefore created and maintained by several sociological factors—individuals, institutions, society, and self. Ethnic identity is, then, a dialectic between internal identification and external ascription. It is a socially negotiated and socially constructed status that varies as the audiences permitting particular ethnic options change. As individuals (or groups) moves through daily life, ethnic identities shifted in and out of prominence depending on the situation. Extending this image, the individual(s) or group(s) can be seen to carry a portfolio of ethnic identities that can be selected among, depending on the restrictions imposed by various social settings and constituencies. The result is an array or layering of ethnicities, with different identities activated at different times. This variable, negotiated view of ethnicity, typifies the constructionist model (Nagel, 1996: 21).

Creoles have historically been seen as “performing” race when in actuality a constructionist model or even a social interactionist view demonstrates that Creoles have been forced by their surroundings to shift from a collective group identity as Creole, to individual identifications with French, Indian, Spanish or African ancestry. Larger structural state apparatus models have compelled Creole migrants to deny the complexity of their ethnic and cultural distinctiveness by not offering a Creole category on any census forms. According to one respondent, anthropology has had a tremendous effect on the study of mixed-race Indian identity in Louisiana throughout the twentieth-century.

Part of it is the anthropologists’ sort of colonialism that spawned anthropology in the first place. It’s where you’re always looking for the pristine people... people who have their culture. It’s the old Boazian thing about finding a whole culture intact. See [John] Swanton wasn’t interested in mixed families at all. He

was looking for “real” Indians. Like there’s a letter, you might run across it, he went below Azeel (sic) and he said, “I heard there were some Indians there and I went...but when I got there, there were just a bunch of Choctaws mixed with Black.” (French/Indian Interview Respondent).

Cultural formation therefore, as opposed to racial formation tends to more specifically and practically link the in-between spaces that inter-lock ethnic identification with not only ancestry and not only patterns of behavior and ritual, but connects both in a complex, fluid, and hybrid formation. Creoles as a mixed-race population subverted in the 1920s, 30s and 40s the notion that any black admixture, meant a completely black cultural identity. Although Creoles that migrated may have been legally defined as Black, their cultural and by extension, ethnic possibilities were multiple through the perpetuation of Creole culture. Culture is the sphere devoted specifically to the production, circulation, and use of meanings. The cultural sphere may in turn be broken down into sub-spheres: art, music, theater, fashion, literature, religion, media, and education (Sewell, 1999).

The study of culture, if culture is defined in this way, is the study of the activities that take place within these institutionally defined spheres and of the meanings produced in them (Sewell, 1999). Creoles rather than “pass” for any other ethnic group, often chose to preserve their new ethnic enclave communities, by reconstructing them through religion and church related rituals. These reconstructions were made possible, not by assuming a “purely authentic” Creole tradition that was “exactly” as it was in Louisiana, but rather it came through the increased migration of new Creole families to areas that had been established by earlier immigrants. Many following immigrant patterns of those who migrated internationally, have sent money so that other Creoles could move during years of deep depression, they also maintained dual households in new states that they moved to as well as in their local parishes. Many who left in the 20s, 30s, and 40s, returned in the 60s, 70s, and 80s to retire and to return to what they “knew as home”.

Together, Freddie and Alma built a new home and life in Los Angeles where they raised their seven children; Carol, Gary, Fred, Jr., Terry, Jacquelyn, Daryl and Rosalind. He worked two jobs most of his life to support and educate his family. Also, he supported the transition of the remainder of the family from Opelousas to Los Angeles. Freddie was an active member of St. John the Evangelist Church. He held several positions in the church to [that] include usher and the Knights of Peter Claver and most recently the administrator of the church hall (Metoyer, *Bayou Talk Newspaper*, Vol. 15 No.3, 2001 Creole Center Archive Records).

Creoles, like the man described in *Bayou Talk* (a national Creole news publication) explain the ways that the community of migrants continued to develop as distinct people despite living away from their homeland. These individuals and collective communities refused to think of race as a “pure essence” as an “authentic” form that places biological considerations above cultural realities. Having limited options, Creoles often did ‘pass’, sometimes because the new community they moved to saw them as white or black only, and in the case of others-like some members of my extended family-they saw it as an economic opportunity and as a true aspect of their identity and that it was their “right” to choose.

CONCLUSION

Cynthia Nakashima (1992) in an article on the denial on mixed race people asserts that the pressure to choose an ethnic identity by non-mixed race communities is what often forced people to become one race versus another. In this sense, I would argue that Creoles during the 1920-1940 period who “passed” for white, were really forced to do that, and that those who in my mind were also “passing” for black, were forced to do that too, when in Louisiana—they might have kept a Creole identity by isolating themselves from mainstream society. Some of these new enclaves, did isolate themselves, but this separation could not cut-off all interaction

between Creoles and non-Creoles. Therefore, while some migrants maintained their identity as Creole, others clearly transformed their individual, familial, and group ethnic designation.

I don't know about everybody in my family. I knew that I was Creole. And Creoles is Black people, Red People, and White people. But what I remember is that when I was in junior high school...and in high school it was different. I could more or less...I knew. I've had people ask me to this day what nationality I am. Like when I was going to junior high school the White folks had it more or less cut and dry, dark against light, light against dark, so I was light, so I was put in with the so-called "White category" and when I went to high school I had to stand up and let them know what was what and you know I had a few fights and this and that, but I had to let them know (Creole Interview Respondent).

So, in order to have a racial and ethnic group with which to belong, multiracial people have been pressured to "choose," on an individual level, which of their groups to belong to. The direction to "check one box only" extends far beyond the census form to just about every aspect of life. In many cases the "choice" is made for the person by society, based on his or her physical appearance. However, often a person does not coincide culturally with the monoracial group with which he or she has been placed based on appearance; his or her cultural experience may have been that of a person intimately exposed to multiple racial and ethnic groups and cultures. For those multiracial people whose physical appearance leaves them racially ambiguous, questions about which group they identify with put them under constant pressure, especially when they feel that whoever is asking the question is looking for a particular answer (Nakashima, 1992:176). The notion of "passing" rarely takes into consideration the idea that an individual can have more than one ethnic identity. Racial formation theory, for example, does not go far enough in explicating the underlying racism and classism at work in the transformation of multiracial identities into monoracial ones.

For Creoles like the respondent above, the peer-pressure to conform to an unrealistic expectation by both Whites and Blacks, is re-interpreted as a mandate to become more extreme and convincing in one's allegiance to one racial group, despite, admitted, physical, cultural, linguistic, and social differences. Actually, the famous old story of "passing" that has so interested both White and Black writers is really just one version of the phenomenon of choosing. "The ideology implicit in passing is hypodescent-that even if the person is genetically part White and looks physically White, as long as he or she has "one drop of Black blood," he or she is Black. In reality, if the character who had passed as White had instead chosen to live in the Black community as a Black person, this would just be another version of passing" (Nakashima, 1996).

A complex combination of cultural, ancestral, societal, symbolic, and individual personality factors give rise to the shift in Creole racial and ethnic meanings during the first half of the twentieth century. These new meanings represent an important historical moment in the transformation and development of the Creole people. The character of the Creoles as a community was deeply and profoundly influenced by the social interactions between their communities nationally and African American communities. Many Creoles outside of Louisiana moved to cities where there were large African American populations from the south. In some cases, strong cultural connections were made between the groups, while in others, inter-group relations were characterized by a distinct, continuing cultural and social separation. In fact, Creoles have faced resentment and displacement from both whites and blacks, and because of late 19th and early 20th century policies, have largely lost specific ancestral ties to their American Indian roots (although as we have seen they do still maintain some important cultural elements of Indian cultures from the southwest and northwest regions of Louisiana).

There is this kind of thing that in the 30's, 40's, 50's, and even 60's to some extent, there was this tendency to shun people in the tribes. People who mixed left-they didn't go far, but they left. And they ceased to interact with "more" tribalized people. For

example with the Tunica, some married Blacks and just moved off tribal land; they'd come back and visit with their families and stuff. They kind of broke family ties in some cases. Sometimes, like in one case I know, where a [Indian] gentleman married a Black lady, when she died, he went back to tribal land, but his children, who were half-Black never did. And when federal recognition passed, they did enroll, and so they were very active in the tribe later on. In the Creole communities of southwest Louisiana there were always Choctaws living and inter-married with Creoles. (French/Indian Interview Respondent).

Creoles during the 1920-1940 period lived in a somewhat paradoxical world because they could not truly be accepted by blacks or whites as Creole, or as "real authentic blacks", and certainly not as "whites" or "Indians". The process of creating new ethnic enclaves within the United States, however, indicates that despite external societal problems of labeling and classifying Creoles racially from 1920 to the present, Creoles themselves kept—even if privately among only other Creoles—this distinct cultural tradition that began in the eighteenth century. Evidence of this paradox, and the ambivalence of the response thereto, may be found in several forms, all of them elusive but suggestive. Demographic settlement patterns suggest a continuation of Creole determination to remain a distinctive multi-ethnic community. The process of "enclavement," a term suggested by sociologist Sr. Frances Jerome Woods, a specialist in Creole social organization, persisted over the decades of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Woods 1989:5). Distinctive Creole communities with fairly clear boundaries, recognized by members of the group as well as by outsiders, managed to maintain their existence over time. Endogamy also continued to reinforce the enclavement process by providing family networks on the basis of community formation and maintenance (Dormon, 1996:170).

Limited in their options during the years of 1920-1940, Creoles of Color fled Louisiana in the face of an emerging crisis that was both

economic and cultural. The legal loss of their distinct ethnic status led to an acceleration in the loss of their distinct cultural status; rather than give this up, many migrated to other larger urban cities where they could prosper economically and where they could maintain a high level of connection to their Creole heritage by participating in cultural (rather than “racial”) rituals and behaviors associated with Catholicism, Zydeco, specific labor skills, and a commitment to higher education for their children. Creole social interaction and community re-construction from 1920-1940 as we have seen could not have been possible without individual and collective resistance to an un-remitting Americanization process. While the legal system has classified Creoles as mono-racial, individuals, groups and organizations still living in many of these mixed race ethnic enclaves are battling to have their own category on the U.S. census. The variable of mixed-race in Creole migration was key to the safe travel and expansion of Creole heritage as inclusive of African, European, and Indian cultures.

This essay has revealed the ways in which Creole families taught their children at every opportunity to preserve their unique identity. Language, religion, and social gatherings were important variables in the formation of these new hybrid communities. The study of Creole migration and community (re)construction may prove useful in understanding the migration patterns of new emigrants to the United States who are also drawn to communities and ethnic enclaves on the basis of a shared mixed race ethnic heritage and social history.

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FOOTNOTES

¹ I would like to acknowledge the support of my dissertation chair, John Brown Childs at the University of California, Santa Cruz, Tomas Almaguer, my faculty mentor from San Francisco State University, Barbara Ustanko for her generous review and feedback on this paper, and the Ford Foundation Postdoctoral Fellowship Award Program which allowed me to secure important release time from my teaching duties to complete this research project which was in part based on research conducted for my dissertation at UC Santa Cruz in 2003.

² The first sign of a change in the classification of Indians came in the form of a 1910 statute (act 220; Louisiana Revised Statute 9:201) that treated the union of an Indian and a person of the “colored and black” race as miscegenetic and thereby nullified it completely. Indians were thereby described as non-colored for the first time in Louisiana’s legal history.

READER EXPECTATION AND ETHNIC RHETORICS: THE PROBLEM OF THE THE PASSING SUBALTERN IN *WHO WOULD HAVE THOUGHT IT?*

Pascha A. Stevenson
University of Nebraska, Lincoln

Mrs. Norval... hoped...Lola might be now all black
or all white, no matter which, only not with those
ugly white spots.

- *Who Would Have Thought It?* 1872 (78)

But these snowy, equable and smooth spots...
sometimes occur amongst our own people. I
have myself had the opportunity of observing
two instances of this kind...The skin of each was
brownish, studded here and there with very white
spots of different sizes.

- "Mulattos" *The Anthropological Treatises of
Johann Friedrich Blumenbach*, 1865 (220)

As illustrated by these two excerpts, the "mixed blood"
provoked in Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, as it does in María
Amparo Ruiz de Burton's Mrs. Norval, a kind of tension, a

sometimes explicit, often insidious fear of racial unreadability and its implications for white domination.¹ Pauline E. Hopkins, a little less than twenty years after Ruiz de Burton published her second novel, would ably demonstrate with characters such as Sappho Clark and Reuel Briggs, the unique capacity of the mulatto/a to disrupt the color line and refute popular and scientific thought about the “innate” differences between the races.²

While Ruiz de Burton’s central figure, Lola Medina, also functions as a kind of disruptive mulatta, initially confounding carefully constructed racial boundaries, she ultimately slips out of her “passing” (usurped?) role as subaltern and into the role of “pure white” imperialist with disappointing ease.³ The potential realized by Hopkins’ characters is not equaled in *Who Would Have Thought It?* Admittedly even an interrupted color line must leave enough of the racial boundary intact for the disruption to be readable. As Samira Kawash explains, “the very notion of hybridity is already predicated on conditions named by the essentializing division it seeks to counter, that is, the color line” (5). A truly disrupted line, in other words, is one exploded into invisibility such that the usual terms for racial quantification – mixed blood, biracial, mulatto/a and so on – become meaningless. Neither Hopkins’ nor Ruiz de Burton’s characters do that. Still, Lola Medina eventually manages to actually galvanize the color line, to make a startling case for white prerogative, and, I would posit, vies for the author’s membership in the upper strata of a spurious racial hierarchy disseminated by some of the nineteenth century’s most revered scientific minds.⁴ Such racial bargaining bears scrutiny, especially in light of the kinds of expectations contemporary readers tend to have of texts authored by persons of color.

In order to understand the nature of such “expectations,” allow me to shift my focus for a moment. At the height of the Harlem Renaissance, as increasing numbers of African American authors finally began to receive the notoriety they deserved, W.E.B. Du Bois lamented. He lamented that black authors had begun to rail against the artistic bind of racial uplift and preferred rather to write what they knew, no matter how “unseemly” that might be. For Du Bois asserted throughout his *Criteria of Negro Art* (1926) that art and propaganda were one. He had earlier contended in *The Souls*

of *Black Folk* (1903) that the beauty revealed to the black artist “was the soul-beauty of a race which his larger audience despised” (616). That this said “soul-beauty” might take an “uncultured” form, the rural black vernacular for example of Zora Neale Hurston’s fiction, troubled Du Bois not so much because he failed to see its artistic splendor but because he was acutely aware of the pressure on black art to prove to white America (that “larger audience”) the personhood of African Americans.⁵ What Du Bois articulated, the conflict over free art verses racial propaganda, has existed since Phillis Wheatley took pen to paper and continues still to find its way into the matrix of reader/writer relationships, especially where ethnic literature is concerned.

Persistent has been the reader expectation that the entire rubric of ethnic literature function as agent of the subaltern, and the subaltern is often conceived of as both author and subject within ethnic discourse. It is frequently assumed that ethnic writers will devote their art to racial uplift or social reformation through heart-of-gold and hardship stories, and there is discomfort when they do not, thus the outcry at Alice Walker’s depiction of black males in *The Color Purple*.⁶

As a Latina, I have had the opportunity to observe the expectations people tend to have of my writing, of me, and consequently of ethnic texts in general. My students, for example, often seem to expect that ethnic writers will talk of nothing but race (and that somewhat defensively), that their stories will focus exclusively on pain, alienation and poverty. When we read writers such as Julia Alvarez who is both Latina *and* comes from an elite socioeconomic background, they are surprised, even shocked.⁷ Ethnic rhetorics, I believe, function within a web of expectation rooted in a kind of identity politics, a highly problematic template in that it misreads at the very least and refuses to read at its worst. The growing emphasis upon racial and ethnic diversity in our college classrooms is certainly welcomed by me, but conceptually, the boundaries of what has become rather simply known as “diversity” need a good deal of stretching, for as Victor Villanueva Jr. warns, “history and culture alone do not make for a political sensibility... such a view is reductive of the complex combinations of cultures and histories in American minorities, and...multiculturalism alone

can be deceptive in that it suggests a friendly pluralism that does not exist outside the classroom” and, I would add, sometimes not even within it (623).

A diversity agenda, it seems to me (though with important exceptions), still too often consists of the benevolent attempt by an enlightened white America to include in the stories it tells, the travails of “darker” people. Automatically conflating ethnic minority and subaltern effectively circumscribes racial minorities within a narrow category that ultimately reinforces Anglo hegemony. This conflation may in part do the important work of recognizing wrongs and hardships, but it can also effect the comfort of the majority group by containing brownness within the rubric of hardship, ignorance, victimization and one-dimensional valorization. Complicating this reductive view as authors such as Alice Walker and Ruiz de Burton have done (each in radically different ways) generates discomfort in every corner, yet that discomfort is an important piece of business in the ongoing effort to “humanize” ethnic peoples in the United States. The very disturbing nature of the racial bargaining in which Ruiz de Burton participates compels us to problematize the tired conceptualization of ethnic rhetoric as the gesture of the subaltern. In short, sometimes ethnic voices are elitist, powerful, mean, racist, sexist, as well as loving, noble, disenfranchised, hurt, victimized, and so forth. A *real* appreciation for the complexity of this picture is vital to the total humanization of persons of color.

I will turn now to Ruiz de Burton’s text for illustration of the “racial bargaining” to which I refer. Cheryl I. Harris reminds us that “In a society structured on racial subordination, white privilege became an expectation and...whiteness became the quintessential property for personhood” (qtd. in Ginsberg 7). Right on cue, Ruiz de Burton’s *Who Would Have Thought It?* features a young heroine whose racial inscrutability compels those around her to question her “personhood.” In chapter eleven, Lola “was decidedly too black and too young for” her white love interest “Julian Norval to take a fancy to her,” but by chapter twenty-one, her spots are all but gone and Julian’s heart is hers (51). Whiteness gives Lola access to everything she is denied as a black woman. The perplexity is that Ruiz de Burton seems to give her approbation to this state of

affairs, not as an unfortunate historical truth, but as a proper race – class alignment.

I am driven to this conclusion by the innumerable instances in which the author identifies “pure Spanish blood” with whiteness, by the obvious fact that Ruiz de Burton enters into Lola’s color anxiety all too enthusiastically. Indeed Lola’s color anxiety itself is worth examining, for while she and the explicitly racist Mrs. Norval seem to be diametrically opposed to one another where race is concerned, actually Lola, our sympathetic protagonist, is just as repulsed as any of the other characters by her dark skin. Instance the scene in which Lola and Julian first reveal their love for one another. Lola tells Julian: “I didn’t care whether I was thought black or white by others, I hated to think that you *might* suppose I was Indian or black. But I did not say anything to you because I thought you might laugh at me, and not believe me” (100). A fear of rejection by her beloved Julian may inform Lola’s self-loathing in this scene, but clearly she betrays genuine disgust for black skin when she tells Julian in that same chapter that her mother “also was made to stain her lovely white skin all black” (100). Julian’s immediate response is to explain to Lola that she is wrong, for his father “already told me that you are of *pure Spanish descent*” (100) [my emphasis].

Lola detests the blackness of her skin, of her mother’s skin because it masks the imperial truth of her “pure Spanish descent,” and why always “pure”? Does not Ruiz de Burton evoke the one drop rule to convince us that Spanish blood is white blood, pure and devoid of darkness? Is this not why Lola’s skin becomes whiter than white, her mother’s hut snowy white, her father’s eyes blue? “Cultural logic,” explains Elaine K. Ginsberg, “presupposes a biological foundation of race visibly evident in physical features such as facial structures, hair color and texture, and skin color” (4). Blood, and particularly the myth of “white” blood, simply functions as a metaphor for all the physical qualities which gain one access to property, freedom, power.

Perhaps the real passing figure in this text is María Amparo Ruiz de Burton. I suggest that Lola’s journey from darkness to whiteness commands metaphorical significance as Ruiz de Burton’s own journey from darkness to whiteness, from Mexican to Caucasian,

from subaltern to imperialist. She seems to be trying, with this text, to forge out of its discourse some sort of reality wherein she too is a white person, able to stand amidst other white people and heave a collective sigh of relief that they are not dark. For the black – white binary makes no allowance for brownness; one is either white and privy to the heritable privileges which accompany whiteness, or one is something else: brown, black, red, yellow; the exact color may not actually be as important as the mere absence of whiteness. Sánchez and Pita contend that the “construction of upper-class Latino/as as white” is “a perhaps defensive – though not defensible – move on Ruiz de Burton’s part, in view of the fact that Congressional records of the period refer to Mexicans in the Southwest as ‘a mongrel race’” (xx). Despite Ruiz de Burton’s hyper-avowal that “pure Spanish blood” is “white blood,” or rather *because* of it, one cannot help but assume that she was aware of the popular racial hegemony in which a Mexican would not have figured amongst the highest members.

Let us return to Blumenbach and his “Table of Colours” which lists seven different color categories: black, sub-black, copper-coloured, red, brown, light brown, and white. This infamous table constructs a kind of continuum with white and black at opposite ends. The highly influential Blumenbach would have apparently taken issue with Ruiz de Burton’s conflation of white and Spanish blood, for he lists Spanish, not under “white” with Swedes, Danes, English etc., but under the second heading “light brown” (367). Although Blumenbach’s explicit purpose in creating such categories is strict classification, not stratification, his implicit purpose is of course to provide a “scientific” basis for white supremacy. Everywhere in *The Anthropological Treatises* he points to the superiority of the fairer races over the darker ones, rendering such categories hierarchical indeed. “It has long since been observed” says Blumenbach, “that far the greater number of men in mad hospitals and jails have black hair” (224). He invites us to compare the “flattened face” of the Chinese with the “symmetrical and particular beauty...common amongst us Europeans” (229). The examples are endless, and the point is that Sánchez and Pita make sense when they interpret Ruiz de Burton’s tenacious alignment of Spanish and white blood as a defensive reaction to a white supremacist culture in which she

probably would not be deemed white.

"Talk of Spanish women being dark!" says Mattie, one of Lola's few allies, "can anything be whiter than Lola's neck and shoulders?" (232). Because Mattie's credibility steadily increases as the novel unfolds, we may be certain that we are meant to believe her when she says first that there is talk of Spanish women being dark, and second that such talk betrays a profound degree of ignorance, for clearly Spanish women are not dark – instance Lola's neck and shoulders. When Mrs. Cackle, on the other hand, exclaims that to her "they are all alike – Indians, Mexicans, or Californians – they are all horrid," we are not to invest any confidence whatever in her ability to perceptively discern the world around her (11).. The very fact that "they" are all alike to her is proof positive that the opposite must be true, for the Cackles are buffoons. Lastly, when the Reverend Hackwell expresses his disgust at the collapse of his plans to steal away with Lola, he abuses her father as the "'accursed blue-eyed Mexican'...Who ever heard of a blue-eyed Mexican? I wish I could choke the rare specimen" (253). By now we know that Hackwell is an absolute scoundrel and are not encouraged by the author to seek, from his mouth, truth or enlightenment. That he finds it incredulous, therefore, that a Mexican should have blue eyes, that he thinks such a man a "rare specimen," should certainly lead the reader to the opposite conclusion.

What these three instances illustrate is Ruiz de Burton's awareness that Mexicans, that Spaniards were perceived by the "ignorant masses" as nonwhite "others." Through these three characters she communicates her understanding of how her own racial/class position is conceived by the cultural consciousness. She is Spanish and therefore dark; she could not have blue eyes unless through some freak of nature; she is "as bad as the Indians." In short she is not white. In light of the knowledge which these three characters tell us Ruiz de Burton must have had about the position of Mexicans within a predominately white society, her insistence upon the equality of Spanish and white blood, upon the literal "sameness" of it, appears all the more defensive. In his excellent article on the politics of race in *Who Would Have Thought It?*, Jesse Alemán argues that Ruiz de Burton's preoccupation with pure Spanish blood is driven by a historically prevalent and

politically advantageous desire to separate her Mexican self from other nonwhite races, such as American Indians, in order to appear whiter by way of contrast (97). Alemán further posits:

Indeed, the contradiction between Mexican American dispossession and claims to white citizenship rights remains a thorn in the side of Chicana/o literary history...Ruiz de Burton, as with many of her upper-class criollo contemporaries, had to negotiate a new position within an emerging American ruling class that by no means readily embraced California Mexicans. (97-98)

The overwhelming consensus among critics, including Alemán, is that Ruiz de Burton clearly bargains for whiteness through a body of work that, by turns, renounces, exposes, and reinforces the racism of her day.

However the matter of reading the author through her text, her history, is tricky at best. Perhaps we are influenced by Ruiz de Burton's ties to the Northeast, her many years residence there, her marriage to a white U.S. army officer, the publication of *Who Would Have Thought It?* in Philadelphia (Sánchez and Pita viii). Perhaps these facets of her personal history compel critics to view her self-positioning as already pseudo-white because of her connection to white American society. But one could just as readily perhaps highlight her *separation* from American whiteness as evidenced, in part, by her impassioned devotion to her own race of disaffected Californios. As she does in many of her letters, Ruiz de Burton expresses such sentiments in an 1859 letter to Platón Vallejo: "it is my most ardent wish that all Californians may cherish forever in their bruised hearts that loyal attachment to their own race" (157). Ultimately, as *Who Would Have Thought It?* illustrates, the boundaries between racial categories are, in some respects, permeable, even at the most racially segregated of historical moments. Ruiz de Burton, therefore, may well function simultaneously as the white Latina suffering from what Raymund Paredes calls "hacienda syndrome," and the disaffected, nonwhite, Californio Latina nursing the wounds of racial prejudice.⁸ The extent to which critical conclusions about Ruiz de Burton's views of race have been influenced by knowledge of her personal

history, her Northeast connections, her California roots, is difficult to determine. I believe the literary evidence for Ruiz de Burton's racial bargaining supersedes personal history, but the two are admittedly intertwined in the scholarship.

I do know the one thing I do not want to do in my analysis of *Who Would Have Thought It?* is operate from a kind of self consciously political position that looks for ethnic authors to make a requisite set of subversive moves, in whatever manner of writing they do – in short, to raise social awareness or speak back to their oppressors. I wholly reject the widespread expectation that writers of color always produce work which addresses racial issues, as if they must speak from racial/cultural positions exclusively. Such a requirement is reductive and insulting; it essentially limits ethnic voices to a kind of discourse of indignance and victimization. And while I have no desire to critique *that discourse itself* (it is often one of profound value and power), I do object to *the expectation* that ethnic authors always employ it. "'Minority' scholars are made to feel it is their scholarly duty to show how resistance to authority is manifest through subversion" says Ruth Spack in "The (In)Visibility of the Person(al) in Academe" (21). We are conditioned, Victor Villanueva Jr. reminds us, to conceive of minorities as subalterns, as oppressed and to expect their writing, therefore, to adhere to a kind of pattern: to create a new history, to raise "a mass consciousness to oppression," to refuse to accept oppression, to document the emergence of the "conscious intellectual" (627).

Both Spack and Villanueva lament the limiting force of identity politics as it constructs a narrow ideological paradigm within which ethnic authors are expected to operate. Such expectations are indeed at the center of my critique, but I also want to qualify that criticism to some extent. For the same "good politics" that fitted Villanueva for his first job in academe, "the minority for the minority-sensitive job. The best-qualified: a brown slum kid, performing research on what happens to minorities in college writing classrooms," also tend to issue from a well intentioned desire to see the subaltern achieve some kind of agency (622). The written word, after all, has the potential to serve as a vehicle for class shift and the righting of terrible wrongs. Nevertheless, I want to be careful of bringing these kinds of expectations to a

text written over one hundred years ago, yet I know that as such a text makes its way into the hands of contemporary readers, the convergence of Ruiz de Burton's and our historical locations will have to be negotiated. I also want to be careful of bringing such expectations to a text based solely upon the ethnicity of its author – this would constitute essentialization at its worst.

Furthermore, it is Ruiz de Burton who broaches the issue of race, of what it means to be white, of what it is to be black, and engaging her within that debate, I cannot help but feel, from a chiefly personal perspective, disappointed with her appropriation of the fallacious language of white blood purity. Not even Pauline E. Hopkins' explicitly passing figures join in the derision of African Americans; their relationship to both the race they pass out of and the one they pass into is complex; it negotiates both push and pull factors. Never does passing for white mean passing for white supremacist for characters like Reuel Briggs. But for Lola Medina and for Ruiz de Burton, on some level at least, such seems to be the case.



The diversity politics now so popular makes little room for the likes of María Amparo Ruiz de Burton, or at least for the facets of her work I have discussed here, and, an over-investment in the minority-as-subaltern narrative would foreground the manner in which Lola is victimized because of her race rather than the manner in which she and Ruiz de Burton function as racists. The complexity of Ruiz de Burton's position in this text explodes the reductive myth of the "noble savage," which seems to me still too much among us, while simultaneously deeply disturbing us with its implicit and explicit white supremacy.⁹ Here is a minority authored text which squirms its way into whiteness, often deriding (and consequently separating itself from) the "darker" races. *Who Would Have Thought It?* provides an important example of the kind of text a "diversity" agenda might teach us to resist or misread. But it is all the more important for us not to resist it *because* of its complexity, because of its ability to unsettle its readers with a warning against one dimensional reduction of ethnic literature to the "subaltern voice" – moving in its pain and valor. This subaltern voice (a contradiction in terms I know) exists and is important, but to

the extent that it is appropriated to contain and essentialize ethnic rhetorics, a text like Ruiz de Burton's proves equally important.

Ruiz de Burton's reticence with regard to compromising the color line is troubling, but the kinds of assumptions about women writers, about minority writers which inform this reaction should also be examined. María Amparo Ruiz de Burton should not be stripped of her historical location, human complexity or disturbing fallibility, nor should her text be made to yield its historical context to political salience. Ruiz de Burton "has become a key figure in the recovery of nineteenth-century Mexican American literature specifically and the reconfiguration of nineteenth-century American literary culture more generally" say Amelia María de la Luz Montes and Anne Elizabeth Goldman in their excellent collection on the same subject (1). They further credit Ruiz de Burton with frank and unique (for her time) acknowledgment of feminine desire, "emancipation from sentimentalism and a sharply discerning eye for political and social hypocrisy (1). The immensity of her contribution to American and American Ethnic literature can hardly be denied, and acknowledging, as many critics have done, her literary (and perhaps personal) quest for whiteness as a companion piece to the condemnation of Mexican stereotypes, does little to detract from that accomplishment.¹⁰ Rather, I hope only to employ Ruiz de Burton's work in yet another capacity, that of illustrating the real diversity of ethnic authors, their humanity, their fallibility, and, through it, our own sometimes narrow conceptions of who such authors are allowed to be, what they are permitted to say. In this sense, Ruiz de Burton has revealed yet another stereotype, that of the ethnic subaltern.

In the end though, I cannot help but lament the passing of Lola Medina into whiteness as the erasure of Ruiz de Burton's own Mexican identity, for (fallacious biology aside) "white blood" is not the same as "Spanish blood," and of this fact she seems quite painfully aware.

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FOOTNOTES

1. Blumenbach's *Anthropological Treatises* of 1865 marks a growing preoccupation in the 19th century – that of classifying the natural world. With regard to race, this text, originally Blumenbach's dissertation, is actually rather forward thinking in its assertion of nonwhite peoples as human. But *Anthropological Treatises* falls prey to the racism of its day when, as with its contemporaries, Robert Knox's *The Races of Men* (1850) for example, classification becomes stratification, and division gives way to hierarchical ordering.

2. Sappho Clark is Hopkins' lead character in *Contending Forces* (1899) and likewise Reuel Briggs in *Of One Blood* (1902). Both figures are characterized as having "mixed blood" and can pass for white but remain, throughout the stories, passionately (if not always explicitly) faithful and sympathetic to their

black heritage.

3. I take the term “subaltern” from Gayatri Spivak’s seminal essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?”. In it she defines subaltern as s/he for whom others must speak, s/he without even the power to make him/herself heard. Interestingly, Spivak complicates this definition with an acknowledgment of the range of subaltern stereotypes now firmly in circulation. She writes: “The banality of leftist intellectuals’ lists of self-knowing, politically canny subalterns stands revealed; representing them, the intellectuals represent themselves as transparent” (275). This essay is widely available, but I take it from Nelson and Grossberg’s *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* published by Illinois UP (1988).

4. I refer here to Charles Darwin, Herbert Spencer, Blumenbach of course, and Robert Knox. I do not claim that all of these men were explicitly racist in their work, rather that, to varying degrees, their work participated in and at times perpetuated the myth of the superiority of whiteness.

5. By 1926 Du Bois had become profoundly incensed at the turn the New Negro movement had taken. This disagreeable though popular new direction became emblemized by what he termed the “Van Vechten school” by which moniker he meant to capture what he saw as the debased nature of the representation of African-Americans in works such as Carl Van Vechten’s *Nigger Heaven* (1926). Ten years later Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) came under similar fire as further evidence that black art had made its way back to the shame of the minstrel show. An excellent and concise overview of Du Bois’ aesthetic and political standards can be found in the *Encyclopedia of the Harlem Renaissance* published by Routledge (2005). See also Bell, Grosholz and Stewart’s *W. E. B. Du Bois on Race and Culture* also published by Routledge (1996).

6. For further exploration of the debate over Alice Walker’s representation of black men in *The Color Purple*, see Alvin F. Poussaint’s February 1993 article in *Ebony*, “Enough Already!”. See also Whitaker and Cobb’s May 92 *Ebony* article, “Alice Walker: Color Purple Author Confronts Her Critics and Talks About Her Provocative New Book,” in which Walker speaks candidly about the pressure to compromise art and personal truth for political expediency.

7. In her 1999 autobiography entitled *Something to Declare* (Plume), Julia Alvarez details the highly privileged life she and her family enjoyed in her home country of the Dominican Republic before immigrating to the United States to escape Trujillo’s bloody tyranny. The young Alvarez lived a life of abundance, with an army of servants, good food, fine cloths and powerful connections. This is an image of Latino/a immigrants seldom circulated in the popular consciousness.

8. I take the term “hacienda syndrome” from Raymund Paredes’ “The Evolution of Chicano Literature” in *Three American Literatures: Essays in Chicano, Native American, and Asian American Literature for Teachers of American Literature*, edited by Houston Baker Jr. and published by MLA in 1982. Paredes uses this term to refer to the contextually expedient conflation of whiteness with Latino/a racial identity.

9. I take the term “noble savage” from Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s famous work, “Discourse on the Origins of Inequality,” in which he describes primitive man

not as a precursor to modern man but as his companion. "Savages," said Rousseau, are still very much among us; they are sometimes the darker races, sometimes rural cultures, always without formal education, the "proper" use of language, and so on. This is, in short, a dubious representation of primitivism, for while it objectifies the "savage in bizarre and uncomfortable ways, it also sets him/her above civilized man as one closer to and in greater harmony with nature. Rousseau saw this harmony as something to be revered, perhaps even envied, but the essentializing tendencies of his theories are obvious. See Masters and Kelly's *Collected Writings of Rousseau* published by UP of New England (1992).

10. For further reading on Ruiz de Burton's contribution to American and Ethnic American literature, see Amelia María de la Luz Montes and Anne Elizabeth Goldman's collection *María Amparo Ruiz de Burton: Critical and Pedagogical Perspectives* published by Nebraska UP (2004). The collection offers a wide range of critical and pedagogical perspectives on Ruiz de Burton's work and life, but the introduction composed by Montes and Goldman does a very nice job of broadly assessing Ruiz de Burton's contribution to the American literary tradition.

WE BOTH EAT RICE, BUT THAT'S ABOUT IT: KOREAN AND LATINO RELATIONS IN A MULTI-ETHNIC CITY

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INTRODUCTION

On any given day, in any given restaurant in Koreatown, countless orders are taken, meals are served, tables are cleared, dishes are washed, and checks are paid. Down the street at a corner convenience store, shelves are stocked, beverages are placed into large refrigerators, and purchases are rung up. Even to the most casual observer, it becomes obvious that Korean workers take the orders and collect the money while Latino workers replenish the shelves, clear the tables, and wash the dishes.

While the routine activity in a restaurant or a convenience store may not seem extraordinary, what is significant is the creation of a common environment where different ethnic groups come together to perform various tasks. These locations, which Louis Lamphere calls “mediating institutions” – including workplaces, schools, apartment houses, community organizations, and government agencies – bring ethnic groups, who would otherwise have only limited contact, together for daily interaction (Lamphere et al. 1994). Because these institutions are often the only places where such ethnic groups have daily contact with each other, ethnic prejudices and misconceptions created within the confines

of these specific interactions develop into widespread belief systems (Lee 2002). That is, when members of one ethnic group form opinions of another ethnic group in these limited settings, they are likely to disseminate this information through their own ethnic networks until these experiences come to be understood as the stereotypical “norm” in interactions with the other group. As such, these interactions have profound implications for Korean/Latino conflict given the structure of certain “mediating institutions” that are likely to bring these groups into daily contact.

In this paper, I argue that the structure of Korean American owned stores relegates Latinos to more difficult and less lucrative positions and Korean Americans to more privileged positions. By doing so, it creates a system of oppression that favors Koreans over Latinos. I argue that such structural arrangements in L.A.’s Koreatown contribute to ethnic antagonism between Korean storeowners and Latino workers. I hypothesize that it is the formation of these specific “mediating institutions,” in the form of split labor markets, which is an important factor in shaping the nature of ethnic conflict between Koreans and Latinos.

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

In 1989, only three years before the Los Angeles uprising, Cheng and Espiritu hypothesized that Latinos and Koreans share an immigrant ideology. Immigrants believe that America is still the land of opportunity and are often willing to work extra hard hours because they hold on to the possibility that they can rise within the established system through perseverance and hard work (Cheng and Espiritu 1989). Their findings, based on an exhaustive search of Spanish language newspapers, suggested that there were no overt racial tensions between Korean Americans and Latinos. Their findings were also mirrored by “real life” events. While blacks in urban areas were actively picketing Korean owned stores in black communities, there was little overt conflict among Latinos and Korean American store owners, even in heavily Latino neighborhoods.

Given the lack of media and academic discussions about Latino and Korean conflict, it isn’t surprising that when the Los Angeles uprising erupted in April of 1992, academic and popular literature

tended to interpret it as a “black riot.” One article attempted to explain the urban uprising by equating events in 1992 with the Watts Riots of 1965 (Chang 1993). The urban uprising became another “black riot” in most media accounts. In this scheme, Korean American merchants became modern-day Jewish merchants while the rioters were still, simply, black (Chang 1993).

However, even before the burning and looting were over, it became obvious that the largest group affected by the damage caused were Korean American merchants who made a living in, or on the periphery of, largely poor Latino neighborhoods. Yet the fact that Latinos constituted a majority of riot participants (Hayes-Bautista et. al. 1993; Park 1995; Pastor 1993), and that the riots were heavily concentrated in largely Latino neighborhoods, was downplayed in both the press and the scholarly literature.

In addition, Latinos constituted 50.6 percent of the 5,633 people arrested while African Americans constituted only 36.2 percent. Given that the most heavily affected areas had a 49 percent Latino residential population, it may not be surprising that nearly 51 percent of the arrested were Latino. However, among those arrested, over 65 percent of Latinos were arrested for suspicion of looting and illegal actions rather than simple curfew violations while only 55 percent of African Americans were arrested for riot related activities. Overall, a larger percentage of those arrested for more serious illegal activities were Latino than would be expected even given their greater numbers in the community. Nonetheless, this lack of coverage regarding the role that Latinos and Korean Americans played during the unrest is not surprising given the long history of looking at race along a black/white paradigm (Alcoff 2003; Park and Park 1999).

Surely, ethnic tensions arising out of competition of limited resources, historically based inequalities, and scapegoating play a major part in this particular ethnic conflict (Bergeson and Herman 1998; Light et. al. 1993). However, these explanations rely on several points that are more relevant to Korean/Black relations than to Korean/Latino relations.

According to the middleman minority theory, certain racial or ethnic groups come to play the intermediate role between the dominant and subordinate classes, particularly in societies

characterized by large class divisions. In these societies, the middlemen groups come to occupy the unenviable position of providing goods produced by the dominant group to the subordinate group by acting as merchants in low-income neighborhoods. Within this arrangement, conflict arises because the customers served by middleman merchants view these merchants as “moving in” on their area and behaving in an economically unscrupulous manner (Bonacich 1973). In fact, several scholars have shown that this seems to be at least partly to blame for black/Korean conflict (Kim 2000; Min 1996; Min and Kolodny 1999; Yoon 1997). However, middleman minority theory assumes that certain groups are targeted because they are viewed as outsiders (Light et. al 1993). While we might assume a high level of black identification with their residential surroundings, this seems a problematic assumption for Latinos. Latinos residing in once historically black neighborhoods are also a relatively “new” group who often view their immediate place of residence as temporary and may not claim nativity (Skerry 1993). In addition, the majority of Latinos do not see Korean American merchants as being “outsiders” who act as a predatory element in their community, a very pivotal point in middleman theory (Cheng and Espiritu 1989; Yoon 1998).

The prevalence of riot-related damage occurring in South Central gives credence to the explanation that the riot was largely a backlash on the part of local blacks against recent immigrants in largely black neighborhoods (Bergeson 1998). In fact, while Korean-owned stores were burned, the overwhelming majority of black-owned businesses escaped unscathed (Lee 2002). However, this argument rests on the assumption that heavily affected areas are in a state of population shift where the group originally in the majority see itself as being threatened by recent immigrants who are seen as taking their jobs and housing. As noted earlier, this analysis suggests that heavy riot activity occurs where there is no significant majority.

However, Koreatown, the second most affected area, with less than 5 percent black population and nearly 70 percent Latino population, clearly does not fit this model (Pastor 1993). This contradiction has led at least one scholar to dismiss the riot activity in Koreatown as a “bread basket riot” where high rates of

poverty accounted for the rioting (Bergeson 1996). This assumes that Latinos in Koreatown were somehow more poverty stricken than Latinos in other areas of Los Angeles County where they did not riot. However:

In terms of community profiles revealed in the 1990 census, Latinos in South Central do not differ substantially from Latinos in neglected areas in the rest of the county, and both of these groups of Latinos differ only by matter of degrees from Latinos in [non affected] areas of the county, by virtue of being somewhat poorer and less educated. However, some key characteristics, such as high rates of family formation and labor force participation, are common to all Latinos. Thus, the key to Latino participation in the riots can not be sought only in the "objective conditions" in which Latinos live; if poverty alone caused riots, Latinos should have been looting nearly everywhere in the county (Hayes-Bautista et. al. 1993, 445).

While the Hayes-Buatista et. al. (1993) study singled out Latinos in South Central and not Koreatown, the argument made is that Latinos in all areas of Los Angeles County share similar economic backgrounds.

To distance themselves from Latino rioters, Latino leaders were quick to point out that Latinos in riot damaged areas were somehow different from other Latinos in Los Angeles, particularly East Los Angeles. They stated that Latino in the areas heavily affected by the uprising were largely Central American and were recent arrivals to the United States (Hayes-Bautista et. al. 1993). While Latinos in Koreatown were a more diverse group with 44 percent coming from Central America, Mexicans still account for 48 percent of the resident Latino population. More significantly, people of Mexican origin made up over 75 percent of Latino residents in South Central Los Angeles (Pastor 1993). While it may be that immigrants in Koreatown are more recent arrivals with 49 percent arriving after 1980 as opposed to the 25 percent arriving after 1980 in East Los Angeles, levels of non-citizenship for all residents in both areas appear less dramatically different at

69.4 percent in Koreatown and 56.2 percent in East Los Angeles. In addition, the higher percentage of recent immigrants and non-citizenship in Koreatown may be due to recent immigrants from Korea as opposed to recent immigrants from Latin America (Kim and Wong 1977).

These findings have led some scholars to state that differences between the Latino population in East Los Angeles and Koreatown were minimal at best (Hayes-Bautista et. al. 1993). What then, accounts for the riot activity spreading into Koreatown and not East Los Angeles, both of which are in approximately equal distance from the riot epicenter of South Central Los Angeles? A possible explanation may come from the ethnic interactions common in Koreatown but not in other parts of Los Angeles where Latinos are a significant numeric majority.

While important to the analysis because of their class position within the affected neighborhoods, Koreans and their actual role ethnic conflicts is not the subject of much investigation. Nor, for that matter, are Asians and Latinos the topic of much scholarship about race (Park and Park 1999). If we assume that the only factor that led Korean owned stores being targeted was class, we might have seen a similar level of unrest in East Los Angeles where other groups own the economic outlets. A possible explanation may be that the pattern of riot activity in Koreatown was affected by the actions that Korean American merchants take in their daily interaction with the local population.

A hint of this comes from the fact that riot related damage was very different in Koreatown and South Central Los Angeles. While Korean owned stores in South Central Los Angeles were more likely to be burned, Korean owned stores in Koreatown were much more likely to be looted (Ong and Hee 1993; Light et. al. 1994). While an argument can be made that Koreatown businesses were more prone to be looted because of the type of goods that they sell, analysis of riot affected businesses in Koreatown and South Central show that all types of businesses were affected in both areas (Ong and Hee 1993). As such, the intent in black neighborhoods seems to have been eviction while the intent in largely Latino neighborhoods seems to have been redistribution.

If we assume that differences between the Latino population in the riot affected areas and the non-affected areas were minimal at best (Hayes-Bautista et. al. 1993), why did Latinos in Koreatown participate in the riots while those in other parts of Los Angeles County did not? More importantly, why did Latinos participate in specific types of riot related activities but not others? I maintain that the activities surrounding the Los Angeles riot of 1992 hint at an underlying friction among Korean storeowners and Latino workers and residents.

This paper is an attempt to explain a possible source of Korean American and Latino conflict in Los Angeles. Drawing largely on ethnographic fieldwork in Koreatown, I place Koreans and Latinos in the context of a multi-ethnic city in order to address the theoretical implications of ethnic conflict, describe the relationship between Latinos and Korean Americans as they interact with each other in Korean owned workplaces, and analyze the nature of these relationships to locate possible factors that may contribute to the formation of ethnic antagonism between Latinos and Korean Americans.

SPLIT LABOR MARKET

The underlying theme of the split labor market theory is that ethnic antagonism develops in a labor market split along ethnic lines. While racial and cultural differences may foster the development of ethnic antagonism, the split labor market theory suggests that economic processes are more fundamental to the creation of ethnic antagonism (Bonacich 1972).

The formation of a split labor market depends on different ethnic groups, with different socio-economic backgrounds entering the same labor market at different rates of pay (Bonacich 1972). The specifics of the formation and existence of the split labor market in Koreatown and the exploitation faced by low-paid workers will be discussed later. However, it is important to note that the existence of a split labor market and the exploitation faced by low-paid workers has been documented in other Los Angeles industries such as the garment industry (Bonacich 1993). Much like businesses in Koreatown, the Los Angeles garment industry is characterized by Korean American bosses exploiting Latino

workers (Bonacich 1993). While the operators of small enterprises may not be the actual oppressors who hold any real power over the general economic process, they are in control of employment and business practices in Koreatown. In addition, because the Latino workers are in daily contact with their Korean bosses, the Korean bosses are the only visible oppressors.

METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

This paper is based on ethnographic fieldwork and interviews conducted between 1995 and 1996, and again in 2003, in Los Angeles. Exploiting existing networks, I sought out Korean American storeowners who owned small businesses within the most heavily affected areas during the 1992 Los Angeles uprising as outlined by the Pastor (1993). Using snowball sampling methods, I interviewed twelve Korean American storeowners and conducted ethnographic observations at their businesses. Among the stores, six were located in Koreatown, four in Central Avenue/South Park, and two in Vermont Square. The stores were all “mom and pop” operations with less than four paid employees. Three of the stores had no paid employees. The businesses included restaurants (four), liquor stores (seven), and one beauty supply store. These interviews were conducted in Konglish, a uniquely American language composed of English and Korean. Where answers were given in English, I transcribed and present them verbatim. Where answers were given in Korean, I translated them to the best of my ability. Four of these Korean American storeowners were interviewed again in 2003.

I met the first of five Latino informants while working as a food server at an Italian restaurant in Santa Monica. Through this initial contact, I earned the confidence of four other Latino workers who all worked for, or were currently working for, Korean employers. All of these interviews were conducted in English. Seven more informants provided shorter interviews which were conducted by a Spanish-speaking assistant. They were identified through her networks. These shorter interviews were used only to clarify and/or support themes found in the five longer interviews. Four of the short interview respondents had no prior experience working for Korean owned stores. However, all previously lived or were

currently living in the areas identified by the Pastor (1993). These interviews, which were conducted in Spanish, were translated by the Spanish-speaking interviewer.

Rather than coding and counting frequencies, I examined the themes found within the narratives. I was interested in how Korean Americans and Latinos made sense of each other. As I examined these themes, I was particularly interested in how members of both of these groups constructed what it meant to be the “other.” Particularly, I found that during their interactions, they actively formed ideas about each other and, through story telling and myth making, they solidified their constructions. More than simply “story-telling,” I took these myths to be an important part in racial formation (Fine and Turner 2001).

WORK PLACE STRUCTURE

According to Bonacich, the development of a split labor market may entail the formation of a caste like system where one group is excludes members from another group from certain occupations with higher pay into occupations with lower pay (Bonacich 1972). This arrangement occurs when the in group cannot exclude the out group from the work force completely. In addition, in many incidences it is not in the employers’ best interest to exclude certain groups.

Workers in the Korean American owned stores are arranged into a hierarchy based on “responsibility” and pay. Often times, these arrangements are made based on availability of labor or owner perception of competence. For example, one Korean informant explains why he does not hire Latino workers for some tasks in this way:

They have to handle money; they have to have a sense about money. They have to be responsible.... it’s an education problem. They (Latinos) don’t calculate things well. For instance, with Koreans, if someone buys two items, they can calculate how much something is. But (Latinos), they can’t calculate these things. They constantly make mistakes so we can’t use these people for that.

This particular informant also stated that he uses Koreans for jobs like cashier and pays them at a higher rate. What is important to note is that if the workers were to be in the same position, they would be paid at different rates. Thus, while Korean store owners have excluded Latino workers from higher paying jobs, this may only be due to the employer's belief that if Koreans were to do the same jobs, they would require a higher rate of pay.

Within this system, rules and conceptions become rigid and vigilant which develops into an "elaborated battery of laws, customs and beliefs." (Bonacich 1972, 482) This, then, leads to the inability of the excluded groups to move into other positions due to the wide spread belief that they are somehow inadequate for certain positions.

Also, there seems to be a perceived oversupply of labor at the lower end of the scale. For example, according to another Korean informant:

There are always lots of (Latinos) coming looking for jobs. So I don't have to worry about busboys or dishwashers, there will always be others. If they don't like their job, then I can always find someone else.

This surplus labor market further reduces Latino power on the job and security of employment. Korean shop owners may prefer Koreans even for the low level jobs, but:

Koreans don't want to do these jobs (busboys, stock, and dishwasher). And even if they did, they wouldn't work for so little. So I hire (Latinos) to do these jobs and they seem okay. Also, Koreans were not meant to do these jobs. Latinos are stronger and are used to the hard work.

The last statement seems to indicate a wide consensus among Korean storeowners about the nature of the type of work Latinos can do. Korean storeowners generally believe that Latinos are somehow "suited" for manual labor based on their social and genetic make-up. One Korean storeowner tells me:

They're (Latinos) stronger than Koreans. So where

strength is needed, they use Mexicans. Even since they were little, Mexicans have worked. But for Koreans, most people don't grow up doing hard work. They usually start working when they are about 25....In Korea, if you're in the position to immigrate to America; it implies a certain social status, so they probably did not do hard labor. But for Mexicans, they are used to the hard work. So when a job requires labor and not any technical skill, Koreans tend to hire Mexicans.

In addition, Koreans tend to regard Latinos as "expendable" workers. This leads to the belief that they can also pay Latino workers less than Korean workers, place them into jobs which are lower in status and pay, and cut employment at their discretion. One Korean informant states:

I have not had any conflicts with my Latino workers, if I did, I could simply fire him and find someone else... There is a demand for these jobs and not enough positions, that's why their wages are so low... Koreans will not do these jobs and even if they did, I would have to pay them more.

The surplus labor market and the willingness for Latinos to provide the labor for these jobs reduce Latino power over their work schedules and give them little power over the security of their employment. This surplus Latino labor allows Korean storeowners to benefit but it is detrimental to Latino workers. By this I mean that Korean store owners not only have the benefit of hiring Latino workers at a lower rate of hourly pay, but offering odd and limited work schedules to further cut employment costs. According to one Korean American employer:

We use him for about four hours a day, seven days a week. He takes home about \$600.00 per month, but we pay him "under the table"... He seems to do all-right, I'm sure he doesn't have too many expenses...he lives with his sister and his rent is only about \$250.00 per month, so I'm sure he has

enough.

The employment practices of the Korean American merchants rob Latino workers of key factors which they consider important to a good job. In a focus group study, Latinos indicated a good job offered job security, sense of responsibility, and upward mobility (Bobo et. al. 1995). Obviously, none of these things were offered to the Latino workers employed by my sample of Korean American merchants.

IMMIGRANT STATUS

The illegal status of an immigrant, as it is defined by the state, carries with it a certain level of discrimination and disabilities (Bonacich 1987). They lack the rights of citizens and are vulnerable to certain conditions which may be placed upon them by others. Therefore, it was not surprising that a significant reason that Korean American merchants viewed Latino workers as being “expendable” came from the merchant’s perception of the workers legal status:

The one’s without green cards are more docile.
They don’t complain as much and work harder.
They have a sense of responsibility to the job and to
the employer.

Later this same informant stated that:

The ones without green cards don’t cause as much
trouble because they don’t want to get in trouble.
They can’t really complain to anyone because they
will be sent back to Mexico. So it’s more comfortable
to have them as workers.

Yet another Korean merchant stated:

I prefer Mexican-born (workers). They don’t know
about American laws. They do as the owner tells
them to do. The ones who are born here, they act
up, make excuses for everything, and threaten to
sue. Of course, I’ve never been sued, but I’ve heard
that’s what they do.

The use of undocumented immigrant labor is widespread in the Los Angeles garment industry (Bonacich, 1993); likewise they may be employed in other Korean businesses. The majority of the

Korean informants stated that they had, at one time, employed an undocumented worker. In addition, several more stated that they were not sure of the status of the Latinos currently working for them.

Korean American merchants use the immigration status of their workers as a method of labor control. Korean American merchants feel that they do not need to offer full-time employment or benefits to their undocumented employees because they believe that there are no legal course of action that can be taken by their employees should they choose to discontinue the employment. This allows Korean American merchants to provide long hours of employment when needed and cut the hours of employment when it is no longer needed. Likewise, undocumented immigrants are often forced to take these jobs. According to a Latino worker:

Sometimes, they have no choice. They have to take the jobs because other people won't give them a job. The Koreans don't care, you can give them any fake papers and they usually don't check up on it. Usually, they pay in cash so it doesn't really matter.

Using the immigrants' illegal status provides Korean American merchants with two benefits. First, it guarantees submissive employment because the employees don't understand the legal course of action they could follow should they find themselves out of work. In addition, paying cash for labor allows Korean store-owners to pay workers less than the required minimum. In addition, they avoid paying taxes on their employees. Furthermore, unscrupulous Korean store-owners can take advantage of the situation. On Latino informant points this case out:

My brother always got less pay than he thought he deserved. He would check his hours and he would always get paid less. But the Korean lady, she said that she was taking taxes out of his pay, but he never got any papers, even after he quit.

Because the undocumented employees often do not file federal tax returns, it leaves the Korean storeowners the option of taking money out of the employees' pay and stating that the money is

going for taxes without really paying them. As such, employers often deduct federal, state, social security, and local taxes without paying them to the government.

WORKPLACE ANTAGONISM

When asked to discuss Korean characteristics, Latinos tend to offer work related characteristics. For example, the Latino informants state that Koreans are discriminating in jobs, mean, cheap, demanding, dishonest, cheats, and angry. In addition, a common complaint against Koreans is that they do not pay timely, cheat you when they pay, show workers little respect, and expect long hard hours for relatively little pay. Although these complaints are work-place related, even Latinos who indicate that they have never worked for Koreans hold these same beliefs. This is interesting when we compare this to the type of complaints blacks expressed against Koreans. Most blacks tended to believe that Koreans are rude to customers, suspected all blacks as shop-lifters, would not give jobs to blacks, and would not extend credit to the credit worthy (Light et al. 1994). The significance of these differences is that Blacks viewed Korean store owners as “middlemen” who entered their neighborhoods and exploited their resources. Latinos on the other hand, seem to view Koreans as employers who exploit workers who are powerless against them. While the percentage of Latinos living in Koreatown who are working for Korean American owned stores could not be determined for this paper, casual observation indicates that Latinos make up the majority of the work force in Koreatown.

Although the Korean hiring practice may be partially due to their own economic limitations (Bonacich, 1987), it still places Latino workers in a situation of low income and low job security. While Koreans make these justifications for their hiring and paying practices, Latinos have a different perception of the workplace environment. A Latino informant sees the pay arrangements differently:

We agreed originally that I would be paid \$50.00 per day for 10 hours of work. I was supposed to come in at ten o'clock, work until three, take a break and come back by six and work another five

hours. But, he always tries to cheat me. He wants me to stay longer and come back earlier from my break. One day, he sent me to clean his house and he didn't give me my break. He didn't pay me for these hours.

Interactions such as these lead Latino workers to view Korean store owners as being dishonest, cheap and demanding. In addition, these stories get circulated around the Latino community until they are accepted as "truths".

In addition, the caste like structure of the workplace causes Latino workers to view Korean bosses as cruel and rigid. While the hiring and paying practices of Korean shop owners may reflect some economic necessity, it has detrimental affects on the livelihood of Latino workers. More importantly, it leads to the perception that Korean storeowners are cheap and dishonest.

CREATING THE "OTHER"

During interviews and ethnographic fieldwork, it became obvious that these interactions were used to create a racial image of the other group. In one particular conversation, a Korean American storeowner told me this story:

I'll tell you what these people are like. Once, I caught this one little kid shoplifting, nothing big, just some candy. When I took him to his mother, she just looked at me in complete shock. Then she asked me what I wanted her to do about it. She asked me why I didn't just take him to the police. Her attitude was, like, I don't care what he does. If you don't like it, take him to the police.

Not surprisingly, this same story was repeated by the majority of the Korean American informants to describe their encounters with Latinos. What perhaps may have been an isolated incident involving one Korean American storeowner has become a sort of an "urban legend" used to generalize all Latinos. In the context of their stores, Korean American storeowners use this characteristic to justify not allowing Latinos to be cashiers. The same informant added:

So you see why they can't be cashiers. I would have

to watch them all the time. At least with Koreans, I can trust them to be honest. Our people are just not raised that way.

Latinos have also used their experiences with Korean storeowners to create an image of Korean Americans. According to one Latina informant:

I would never work for a Korean. They cheat you, they treat you badly, and expect you to work so hard for so little pay. They are greedy people these Koreans. They are no good.

When asked if she had ever worked for a Korean storeowner, she simply replied:

I don't need to work for them to know. All of my friends who work for Koreans say the same thing.

For both Koreans and Latinos, the interactions within these specific "mediating institutions," in this case the Korean-owned workplaces, have led to the development of stereotypical images for the other. Once developed, these stereotypes were diffused to the larger ethnic community until the grievances of a few became the grievances of the many. As for Korean American storeowners, they came to view Latinos as being unworthy of better job opportunities and thus further limited their ability to enter better paying jobs in the Korean enclave. As for Latinos, they further began to see Korean American storeowners as greedy merchants who would never provide better opportunities for them.

ON A SIMILAR NOTE

Ironically, the "stories" that Latinos and Korean Americans tell about themselves are strikingly similar, not surprising given the specific historical and contemporary similarities shared by the two groups (Alcoff 2003; Kim 1999; Park 2004). When asked why they immigrated to the United States, one Latino informant told me:

We [he and his wife] came here for our kids. We really wanted to give them a better life, better than what we had in Mexico. It's hard in Mexico, these

young people, even if they finish school, they have a hard time getting a good job and having a good life. Here, they could go to school and find something good for themselves.

Not surprisingly, a Korean American storeowner said:

We [he and his wife] came here because we wanted a better life for our children. It's hard in Korea. In Korea, they would be under so much pressure and so much stress. And they would need a lot of connections to succeed. Here [in the U.S.], if they study hard, go to a good college, and work hard, they could succeed.

Their worries were similar as well. When asked what their biggest concern was, members of both groups tended to point out the rapid "Americanization" of their children and the loss of "their" culture. As one Latino worker said:

I worry about my daughter. In Mexico, we wouldn't have this kind of problem. Here, she feels like she can wear whatever she wants, go wherever she wants, and do whatever she wants. This isn't right.

Both groups, as Cheng and Espiritu point out (1989) do seem to share and "immigrant ideology" and believed strongly in the "American dream" of hard work leading to success, at least for their children. Both groups viewed America as a place where hard work and perseverance would one day pay off with a better life. As such, both groups saw themselves as having a very strong work ethic. As one Latino worker relayed:

When I first started looking for jobs, like many people from Mexico, I went to the street corner. But many people come to the corner, fifty guys are there and they are looking for an opportunity. Sometimes they don't get an opportunity. I was working with this young guy and he told me he was going to quit, but I talked him out of it. I said 'what are you going to do, you want to go to the street again, to wait one, two, three days to get fifty dollars? This is better.'

And another said:

It's for sure, I have my work for sure. That's important, for Mexican people to keep working everyday is important. Everyday its hard work, but many people want to do it.

Likewise, Korean merchants also spoke of their diligence:

One time this guy came into the store and said, "You have it easy, nice car, your own business." So I told him, I work 12 hours a day, everyday. I never take a vacation, never go anywhere. If I get sick, I don't make any money. Who has it easy? When I told him that, he looked at me and said, "I guess it's not easy."

For both groups, self descriptions work to promote themselves as the moral superior. If there is any "success," it is due to their hard effort and diligence.

However, Korean American storeowners seem to be aware of their dependence on Latino labor. As one storeowner told me during the California recall election:

We're all very nervous right now. If [Arnold Schwarzenegger] becomes governor, he's going to round up all the Mexicans and ship them off. Most of us can't run our businesses without them, so we're all very nervous. This is a big concern among all the people that I know right now.

Ironically, despite this understanding that they are dependent on Latino labor, members of both groups seem to fail at seeing the similarities. When asked what they felt they had in common with Latinos, one Korean storeowner told me:

We both eat rice, but that's about it. We really don't have much in common with them; we're just from very different cultures.

CONCLUSION

While the black/Korean conflict has been the subject of

much scholarly work, relationships between Korean Americans and Latinos has not been the focus of much scholarly literature. Koreans, when discussed in reference to ethnic conflicts, were only incidental to the analysis because of their class positioning as middlemen (Chang 1993; Jo 1992; Min 1989). The explanations advanced so far placed Korean Americans as misunderstood, hard working minorities who were victims of black antagonism arising from historical injustices committed on them. While it may be true that Korean American placement in the new urban environment may have led to their being scapegoated, the fact that they seemed to have come under attack by two different ethnic groups may indicate that they also have a role in shaping ethnic relationships.

Although this paper centers on the role that Koreans play in ethnic conflict, it is important to state that Korean small business owners, particularly those operating small manufacturing operations, hiring cheap Latino laborers and exploiting them is a reflection of the globalization of the world economy. As capitalistic competition continues to take on a more global character, with manufacturers increasingly relying on low cost labor in order to compete effectively in the global market place, manufacturers shift production from the “developed” nations to “developing” nations where labor costs are lower. This shift from a production-based to a service-based economy in the “developed” nations, however, leads to the displacement of unskilled workers in these regions, with the effect of driving down wages (Ong, Bonacich, and Cheng 1994). Ironically, the in-flow of capital into a region also leads to an out-flow of labor as natives displaced from their land look for opportunities in areas where capital is fleeing (Sassen 1988). In order to stay competitive, Korean American merchants, particularly those who engage in light manufacturing, are almost “forced” into hiring the cheapest possible labor supply. While light manufacturing is the obvious arena where lower labor costs abroad drive down wages at home, it leads to a reduction in wages in other industries as lower wages leads to lower spending in other arenas and a weakening of labor unions (Bonacich 1998; Ong, Bonacich, and Cheng 1994).

Also, this paper should not be taken as an implication that the conflict between Korean American merchants and Latino workers

“led” to the Los Angeles uprising. By now, we should all be familiar with the actually social, economic, and political factors that led to the now historic event. My discussion about the Los Angeles uprising was simply to point out that there may have been more to the Latino participation in Koreatown, and Korean/Latino conflict by extension, than the simple factor of class.

More importantly, my research allows us to think about possible avenues of further research regarding minority relations in Los Angeles and the rest of the country. It allows us to start asking questions of Korean American merchants as actors in the shaping of ethnic relations rather than as scapegoats or innocent bystanders. This allows us to inquire if other factors may be at play in the formation of ethnic conflicts in multi-ethnic settings.

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MULTIPLE IDENTITIES, CITIZENSHIP RIGHTS AND DEMOCRATIZATION IN AFRICA

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This particularistic and exclusionary form of identity politics has intensified in recent years within and among nations..... It is responsible for some of the most egregious violations of international humanitarian law and, in several instances, of elementary standards of humanity.... Negative forms of identity politics are a potent and potentially explosive force. Great care must be taken to recognise, confront and restrain them lest they destroy the potential for peace and progress that the new era holds in store (Kofi Annan, *The Guardian*, (Nigeria) 1997:8).

Single or multiple identities underlying fears of losing national culture is an implicit belief that identities are singular. But people do not have single fixed identities. They have multiple and often changing identities and loyalties. Accepting Multiple Identities is a major social transformation. But history shows that it does happen. Almost all European countries

have undergone such a transformation. (pp.101-102
Human Development Report 2004).

INTRODUCTION

The colonial project which was foisted on Africa largely by Britain and France left the continent more dis-united and generated more consciousness among groups about their distinctiveness and those factors that separated them (“we”) from others (“they”). One of the most enduring outcomes of the colonial contact was the creation of self-doubt and the negation of identity formation among the dominated population. Frantz Fanon (1969:200) gave an eloquent account of this development when he said *inter alia* that

Because it is a systematic negation of the other person and a furious determination to deny the other person all attributes of humanity, colonialism forces the people it dominates to ask themselves the question constantly: In reality, who am I?

Under the guise of anthropology as a scientific enterprise, scholars made fortunes out of highlighting the features of warrior tribes or what were referred to as the martial races, and their kingdoms, state and acephalous societies. The presence of large ethnic groups, some of them far larger than those in Europe, was conveniently ignored so that the label and stigma of tribe would stick. In the main, some of Africa’s complex socio-economic and political organizations were ignored by European authors.

In the struggle that culminated in Africa’s independence, the different groups were, in most cases, forced to coordinate their struggle in order to be free of colonial domination. It must be remembered that the road to independence was bloody in most cases, though in some, it was granted on a platter of gold. The Mau Mau uprising in Kenya and the coal-miners strike as well as the Aba Women’s riots in Nigeria symbolized bloody resistance to colonialism and its methods. Kenya’s rural producers objected to land redistribution away from peasant farmers. The Mau Mau resistance was severest in settler regions where there were plantations. It was in essence, Kenya’s peasants resistance to

the colonial occupation of their land. Really, there were many features of the colonial society that were provocative: segregation in housing, employment and schooling, and the killing of natives for pleasure.

The colonial setting thus produced a culture of violence and brutality directed at the natives. The claim of a civilizing mission in Africa by the colonial powers was indeed absurd. Africa later realised its naivety in endorsing, generally without much resistance, the European incursion into its territory, the enslavement of its people and the exploitation of its resources. This awareness, however, came rather too late. The damage had been done. Communities had been decimated, resources looted and ways of life had been adulterated. The trust basis of society and the perception of others as the extension of the self almost became extinct. A world-renowned novelist, Chinua Achebe, had provided an excellent summary of this development in *Things Fall Apart*, and for Africa the centre indeed no longer holds. In the definition of the colonisers, to be accepted as modern, Africans must evidently demonstrate a measure of distance from their culture and thus from their roots. Africans were and still are expected to exhibit a hatred for themselves if they are to be described as modern thus, part of globalisation – a new euphemism for slavery and dependency. Really, how can one hate the *self* which is what an individual's denial of his culture comes to? Unfortunately, in several facets of life in Africa, self-denial of our essence lingers.

The colonial constitutional development created a new consciousness by making ethnic affiliation a major element in political socialization and leadership recruitment, but at independence, the goals that were set included national integration rather than regional or ethnic solidarity. What a paradox? These goals were incompatible as loyalty to the ethnic or regional groups was difficult to transfer to the nascent state. In fact, as for the majority, the notion or the existence of the state was only on paper or an idea of the empire builders, itself an afterthought as it was after World War II that preparations were commenced, shoddy ones at that, for the transfer of power to the colonial subjects. The colonial order was strident in its opposition to collaborative activities between ethnic groups. Colonialism triumphed mostly

on the divide and rule tactics.

Thus individuals in the post-colonial African society display multiple identities. These identities are variously expressed. An individual's membership of the new nation-state is a nascent form of identity expression. The individual's membership of his ethno-religious group is much older and more enduring than his membership of the new nation-state. The individual may also be a member of the recently-formed employee's association – the Trade Union Congress. The identities that can be paraded are indeed numerous. These multiple identities come to play in moments of critical decision-making and these identities do affect an individual's life chances, the socio-economic and political opportunities that are manipulable by him. These loyalties, rather than waning, have waxed over the years and they do have implications for the enjoyment of citizenship rights and Africa's democratization processes.

These identities are often conflicting in the interests that they seek to project and protect. They may, in fact, obstruct the universalistic and libertarian principles on which democracy is premised. They are, however, not fixed as they are open to activation or suppression or even transformation depending on the events in the social environment (see the opening sentences by Kofi Annan). There are certain objective realities that dictate which of the several identities comes to the fore. State actors in Africa seems to prefer the fragmentation of identities as these make the formation of a formidable opposition that could challenge the state's hegemonic rule a remote possibility. The state could thus act surreptitiously to encourage the factionalisation and disintegration of strong civil societies in order to ward off strong counter-hegemonic forces and thus weaken those identities that are considered as undesirable. A faction of the state, armed with strong identity credentials, could also seek to pull down the state. The foregoing issues are made more explicit in the following discussion.

Some definitions of the key words in this paper are appropriate. The Harper Collins Dictionary of Sociology refers to identity as the sense of the self that develops as the child differentiates from parents and family and takes a place in society. The sense of identity could be based on ethno-religious and temporal factors or geography.

It is often the basis of social action and political behaviour. The sense of identity deepens in a plural society where a group, just for reasons of its being different, suffers discrimination. Identity could also be based on some physical characteristics. Citizen's rights refer to those rights that one enjoys by virtue of one's membership in a country. The scope of these rights owes a lot to the profile of the state and political struggle. By democratization, it has meant the opening up of the political space, the demise of military rule and the introduction of multi-party democracy in place of the one-party state. However, we could have multi-partism with individuals not really having alternatives to choose from.

This paper's objective is to highlight how multiple identities may facilitate or hinder access to citizenship rights. Multiple identities are paraded for a variety of reasons. They may have their own relative autonomy but somehow they connect individuals to specific rights and privileges from which others may be excluded. Democracy, on the other hand, claims universalistic ethos. Theoretically, therefore, democracy and the disclosure of multiple identities cannot co-exist as they have potentially conflicting appeals.

In the second section, the paper raises some theoretical issues while in the third section, the paper focuses on identity politics and democratization in Africa and highlights how the outcome has impacted on citizenship rights. The conclusions are contained in section four where I issue a caution on the problem of politics of social exclusion as I attempt to plot the path to a sustainable democratic future for Africa in the midst of multiple identities. By its very nature, democracy does not admit nor approve of group rights yet in Africa, groups claim to property (until recently) eminently override the claims of individuals. The challenge, therefore, for scholars in and about Africa, is how to make the practice of democracy in Africa become more accommodative and tolerant of plurality of identities and thoughts while simultaneously advancing citizenship rights and thus democratic consolidation.

SOME THEORETICAL ISSUES

To those who believe that globalization is a most desirable and beneficial phenomenon, the resistance to it remains a major puzzle. In many parts of Africa, Asia, the middle East and Latin America,

what globalization holds out are believed by many to be false. The more the intensity and profundity of the change process, the more enduring seems the value system that contradict the move toward a uni-polar global hegemony. This resistance has several dimensions. The most worrying is that which seeks to emphasize and even adore the distinctiveness of a group, its homogeneity and those characteristics which separate it from those of the others. In the extreme, this position does not admit of ethno-religious and political pluralism. This world view was similar to the position of those who regard the triumph of western civilization as incontrovertible and inexorable. An average African, perhaps an Asian too, simultaneously discloses multiple identities – a village person, a town's man or woman, a Muslim or Christian, an active member of an ethnic association, an employee and employer, a politician, member of an old school association, an age grade member, a unionist, an active member of a neighbourhood association and perhaps a lineage head. The demand of these diverse associations on an individual may conflict and if simultaneous, is capable of creating a dilemma for the individual actor.

Social formation in Africa is complex, and identities may appear to be ambiguous and conflictive as individuals simultaneously occupy many roles. In my field work experiences, I have come across individuals who are labourers, farmers, employers and shop owners at the same time. Most Africans actively participate in the formal and the informal spheres simultaneously. The playing out of many roles sequentially or simultaneously is seen as normal by many. A Nigerian politician describes himself in the following terms is indeed typical of others:

I am a living laboratory of my age.... I am at once the cocoa farmer, mercantile clerk, the civil servant, the petty trader, the transporter, the capitalist and the intellectual (and now the politician) all materials for the study of the social scientist (Adegoke Adelabu quoted in Post and Jenkins, 1973:33).

Where individuals parade multiple identities, role multiplicity sets in which in turn complicate social class formation and political action as well. Thus an

analysis of politics, religion, kinship were a

part of any adequate account of social change as economics and that the manner of their interaction, in any particular society, must be a matter for open enquiry, rather than the known consequences of a universal model of society (Peel, 1983:6).

How to account for the re-surgence of identity based politics and its enduring nature in the midst of globalization remains a major challenge for academic and state actors especially those who believe in a unipolar world and read too far into the end of the cold war as signifying 'The End of History' (Fukayama, 2001). Some authors indeed had predicted the ultimate triumph of western civilization and its values in its competition with other civilizations (Huntington, 2001). The event of 9/11 was however a sad reminder that there are people in the world that do not see the reality that others cherish, who reject the consumption-oriented society and who do not subscribe to the values which others hold dear. The end of history is thus further away. The demise of bipolarism and of the Russian empire may not really signal the end of history nor the ultimate triumph of western values. The future is really pregnant with a lot of meanings. It is worthwhile to recognize that identities are not static, they get transformed and are open to manipulation. In their transformation, groups that were otherwise once antagonistic may be forced to pool resources and sink their differences in order to confront what is perceived as a common monster. The forging of political alliances are often dictated by vested interests and these are often open-ended, and practical realities would dictate which alliances are most feasible and which of the identities should be on the front burner.

In both the developing and even developed countries, groups within states whether these groups are religious or ethnic groups, are claiming rights that are exclusive to them and from which others are to be excluded. Indeed, identity-based politics has not abated whether in Spain between the Basques and the Spaniards; or in Belgium between the Fleming and the Walloon; or in the Irish Republic between the Catholic and the Protestants; or in America between the American-whites and the other hyphenated-Americans; or in Nigeria between the different ethnic groups; or

in Rwanda between the Hutu and Tutsi. In its early history, the American-whites did not all have the same rights – the timing of migration to America was initially important in the determination of political rights (see Archdeacon, 1984).

There has emerged a serious contestation between the rights being claimed by those who consider themselves and their groups as indigenes and those who are considered by them as “strangers” and who may also see themselves as such. Behaviour and attitudes that have practical outcome for social exclusion are often premised on these distinctions between the notions of “citizens” (indigenes) and “strangers.” Mamdani (1996) had referred to this dichotomy between citizens and strangers in terms of citizens and subjects, whereby the colonial regime administered the people of the colonies under two laws - one for the citizens and the other for the subjects. The exclusionary practices that flow from this dichotomy do occasionally produce overt behaviour that could burst out. The social fabric of society could be eroded thus endangering political stability and peaceful co-existence of groups. The modern state is thus under pervasive pressure from groups that make competing claims over the state’s scarce values. The state is hardly in a position to meet the claims of competing groups over state resources. Whatever our conception of the modern state, in spite of all its paraphernalia and sophisticated architecture, is after all, preoccupied with the regulation of the relationship between diverse groups and interests in society.

In the relationship in which individuals and groups become entangled, they are often not equally treated. The denial of access to significant resources may endanger political stability and the enjoyment of citizenship rights by identifiable groups in society. Social and political inequality promote feelings of alienation and frustration. Political participation becomes encumbered. The connotation of citizenship as ‘full members of the community’ (Marshall and Bottomore 1992: 18) is denied to those who are perceived as being different from others. There are three kinds of rights that have become popular – civil (rights of free speech, right to worship etc); political (right to vote and be voted for); and social (right to housing, health, etc). These rights, even under advanced capitalism can readily be abridged or compromised.

The concepts of social prejudice and stereotype are important in understanding the ways in which people judge and treat others (the out-group) who are different from them (the in-group). Somehow, through the process of socialization, individuals begin to construct their identities. As individuals become full-fledged members of their society, they unconsciously acquire its cognitive map of 'we' and 'they' and they thus inevitably inherit a world that had been perfected by others. Individuals' view of reality become tainted from birth. This view often fails to recognise other systems of seeing and being. The end-product of this process could be hatred or love for others that are adjudged as being different. This point raises some methodological issues which are outside the scope of this discussion.

Bibby's (1959) work dealt extensively with how prejudice impact on our behaviour toward others. Prejudice forces people to draw conclusions before having the opportunity to interact with others. Though prejudice is learned, it is difficult to unlearn even when compelling information to the contrary is presented. Hatred is an extreme manifestation of social prejudice. In this connection, I can mention the massacre of the Jews during the second world war. There was also the hatred of the Arabs and Islam in America and Europe after the event of September 11 (see Mamdani, 2004). In France, the ban on head ties was believed to be directed at Arab women. In Rwanda, the mutual distrust and hatred between the Tutsi and Hutu, and between the Croatia and Serbs in Yugoslavia are examples of this point. The human tragedy in the Darfur region in Sudan is the outcome of social prejudice, social exclusion and intolerance. The Darfur region in southern Sudan had been the cynosure of world attention because of the Sudanese genocidal attacks on the non-Arabs. This tragedy is a direct result of the Sudanese government's failure to manage multiple-identities and pluralism.

As a response to the centrifugal tendency and the exclusionary politics that social prejudice and stereotype may generate, states have often designed different political contraptions to contain the divisive implications. It would be recalled however, that colonial rule had previously amplified the wedge that might have existed previously between groups. Thus, as a prelude to its politics of

divide and rule through the indirect rule system, the ethnographers and anthropologists of Africa had altered the Africans' mode of thought. This was accomplished through the categorization of Africa into different ethnic and linguistic groups with little regard to common identities. Yes, differences existed, but these are often exaggerated to make nonsense of any possibility of reconciliation or coordinated action against colonial domination. The concept of tribe was used to refer to the people of Africa irrespective of the level of social and population development. But European groups with even lower population and less sophisticated political architecture were described as nations. That the anthropologists and the missionaries were the handmaidens of colonialism could not be disputed and in many instances they collaborated and their activities reinforced each other. It did not, therefore, take much time before Africans began to think of themselves in terms not of their own making (Grinker and Steiner, (1997:47).

The intellectual support which was provided for colonialism, the self-doubt, and social prejudice that thereby became fostered cannot be regarded as insignificant. Among Europeans and Africans alike, the thinking that some people were unprogressive and unintelligent whereas other groups were portrayed as the opposites became widespread. The work of Levine (1966) on ***Dreams and Deeds*** was one of such classic works in the fostering of social prejudice. Levine's work identified the Ibos as more mobile on the indices of modernization and were followed closely by the Yoruba with the Hausa-Fulani trailing far behind the two major groups. The practical consequence of this 'scientific' endeavour and similar other works was a portrayal of the different African groups as not only incompatible but with antagonistic and irreconcilable aspirations. A year after this publication, the civil war broke out in Nigeria. It is not being suggested that the book was the cause of the Nigerian civil war but such anthropological works fueled feelings of group hostilities. Such writings had offered enough justifications for the exclusion of certain groups from socio-economic opportunities.

However, the fallacy of this social science thought was evident in Nigeria where the Hausa-Fulani ethnic group was thought of by Europeans as unprogressive, unintelligent and backward. These

writings were in the main ideological and teleological hence Claude Ake's reference to social science in Africa as imperialism (Ake, 1979). African leaders, however, continue to fan the embers of hatred and parochialism as these suit them. In Nigeria for example, the Hausa-Fulani, mainly because the British handed over power to the group believing that they were more pliable and conservative have come to see themselves as destined to rule. This remains strong and the northern governors once said '... whatever anyone may say, the incontestable fact remains that in the political equation of this country, the North holds the ace. In fact, if there is no North, there will be no Nigeria' (*Sunday Punch*, November 19, 2000). This hardened prejudice makes nonsense of the dialogue under the auspices of the National Political Reform Committee which was inaugurated on February 21, 2005. Not surprisingly, the issues of resource control, resource sharing and of which ethnic group should rule dominated discussions at the meetings of the Political Reform Committee. The participants did not demonstrate equal concern to wealth creation, good governance, social justice and how to overcome mutual suspicion between groups.

Unless social prejudice is moderated, the practical outcome would be that some individuals would come to be defined as strangers (or settlers) and would be regarded as having no full citizenship rights which are available to the indigenes. The citizenship claims which are open to the non-indigenes became qualified and the foundation for treating them unequally and with disdain had become established though sometimes contestable. In these ways, identity politics become antithetical to the notion of democracy and the rule of law as outlined by Montesque and John Locke. What really is left of citizenship rights in the absence of equality before the law and equality of access to the market, education, healthcare and housing among others? Without the right to vote and the right to property, citizenship rights are deprived of all their vitality and spirit. Some of the ways in which identity politics constitute a direct challenge to the nuances of democracy and the very notion of citizenship are discussed in the next section.

IDENTITY POLITICS AND DEMOCRATIZATION

Identity politics revolves around the parade of particularistic features as the basis for political participation and inclusion as well as the enjoyment of citizenship rights and privileges. This identification could be such parameters as gender, ethnic, language, religious or regional affiliation. In India for example, distinctions are made between the different caste groups – some are regarded as free born and they exercise more political, social and civil rights than the others. Marriage and other forms of interaction are not often permitted between the groups in order to avoid contamination. In the eastern part of Nigeria, the *Osu* caste is discriminated against in marriage, economic and political sphere. Even in the United Kingdom, it is difficult for someone who is not from the mainland to become the Prime Minister. Scotland not only has its own judiciary but it is also set to have its own foreign mission in such countries as China. The battle for self-determination by the Basque is believed to have reached its crescendo. The Fleming and the Walloon in Belgium continue to contest their ethnic autonomy. Also very early in its development, there were qualifications as to who can become senators or representatives in the American Congress. Foreign-born Americans were not then on the same footing as home-born Americans in terms of citizenship rights.

Identity politics is not a phenomenon that is unknown to Western European or North American politics nor is it disappearing under advanced capitalism. To be a representative or a senator, one must have been a citizen for at least 7 or 9 years, respectively, prior to assuming office. This provision was contained in Article I. In Article II of the U.S. Constitution, it was decreed that no immigrant naturalized after the adoption of the Constitution could become President or Vice-President (see Archdeacon, 1984:54).

Because it emphasizes political participation and the exercise of rights that draw from particularistic principles, the universalistic and libertarian notion of democracy become easily compromised. Even where the codes of entitlements to participation are written down, there are norms and practices which define those that are to be included. Under such a system, competitive politics is handicapped. Political roles become rigidly defined and those who capture political power see it as divinely ordained. In a multi-ethnic society, however, individuals who transcend identity politics may

have an upper hand and wider base to recruit supporters from. There are individuals whose identities are not straightforward either for reasons of marriage or birth. Though Soni Ghandi led the Congress Party to victory, she could not become the Indian Prime Minister because she was regarded as a foreigner – an Italian by birth but an Indian by marriage. During her campaign, she herself had made use of the Ghandi's family respected identity.

This particularistic notion of politics is more common in Africa and in spite of Africa's claim to be experimenting with democratization, instances of erosion of democratic and citizenship rights are on the ascendancy. I shall refer to four case studies to illustrate the vibrancy and not the demise of identity politics in Africa as has been theoretically and enthusiastically announced by some authors. I relied on the internet and newspapers for most of this section. Sometime in 1996, the then President of Zambia, Frederick Chiluba, (using the machinery of his Movement for Multiparty Democracy), altered the constitution of the country to prevent Kenneth Kaunda from standing for elections. When Kaunda challenged the constitutional provision which sought to strip him of his Zambian citizenship, the court ruled that Kaunda, being born of Malawian parents and having not renounced his Malawian nationality, had thus governed Zambia illegally from 1964-1991. Of course, it was clear that the intent was to prevent Kaunda from exercising his political rights in the 1996 election.

In Cote d'Ivoire, identity politics came to the fore after the death of its former dictator – Felix Houphount-Boigny in 1993. Henry Konan Bedie had assumed the presidency of the once buoyant West African cocoa-producing economy. Bedie sooner than later introduced a new concept of 'Ivorite' – real Ivorians as different from foreigners. The hidden agenda being to regulate political competition. Alassane Quattara was the first casualty and the only target. Though many became victims of this obnoxious policy as they were disenfranchised (because of their new identity as foreigners), Quattara who was the main target was prevented from contesting the presidential election. This politics of exclusion remains at the centre of the crisis in the once peaceful and buoyant Cote d'Ivoire that had previously been paraded by France as a model of a progressive economy and stable country. The groups

at war in Cote d'Ivoire are yet to lay down their arms.

Sometime in 1982, Nigerians woke up to learn of the deportation of Abdul Rahman Shugaba, the then majority leader of the House of Assembly in Borno State, Nigeria. The allegation against him by the then civilian administration was that he was not a Nigerian but from a neighbouring republic. Shugabi's real offence, however, was that he was being too critical of the then federal government. The federal government was also uncomfortable with Shugaba's association with the then progressive politicians in southern Nigeria. The ruling northern political party (the National Party of Nigeria) thought that Shugaba, being a northerner, should identify with his fellow northerners and their dominant political party. Though the court ruled that his deportation was illegal, he suffered serious infraction of his fundamental rights as a citizen.

The events in Togo, West Africa brought to the surface the resilience of identity politics. After the death in February, 2005, of President Eyadema, who had ruled Togo since 1967, his son, Faure, was hurriedly sworn in after the constitution had been amended to prevent the Speaker from ascending to power. The only qualification of Faure was his being the son of Eyadema. Of course, this provoked a series of demonstrations and it attracted sanctions from ECOWAS and the African Union. Elections were later held and Faure was elected.

The above illustrations have shown how identity politics can obstruct the wheel of democratization as it erodes the political rights of citizens. It could sometimes degenerate into forced migration and mass displacement of people who are routinely turned into refugees as the struggle for citizenship rights assume fratricidal dimension. There are ample instances of this in Africa. Once the political rights of citizens are violated, the assault on other rights become common. Identity politics can, in this way, constitute impediments to development. In Nigeria for example, there are parts of the country where land rights may not be granted to non-indigenes and where those who regarded as such are confined to specific areas meant for strangers. So frustrating to Nigeria's President was this phenomenon of "strangers" and "settlers" that he declared in 2004 that 'All Nigerians are settlers' (*The Punch*, July 3, 2004). The manipulation of multiple identities

endangers the very tenet of liberal democracy. In Nigeria, it poses a direct challenge to property rights (see Nnoli, 1978:115-116). In the conclusions which now follow, I outline the ways in which multiple identities may obstruct citizenship rights and thus the consolidation of effective democratization in Africa.

CONCLUSIONS: MULTIPLE IDENTITIES AND EFFECTIVE DEMOCRATIZATION IN AFRICA

Africa has certain features which may not predispose it to effective democratization. Unlike the countries of Western Europe where most people live in an urban environment, most of Africa's population reside in the rural areas. Though the annual rate of urban population growth outstrips that of the rural area, yet over 60% of Africa's population of about 500 million are rural dwellers. Rural poverty is also more severe than that of the urban area. Whereas urban dwellers may employ or adopt strategies to escape some imperatives of the consequences of multiple identities, their rural counterparts have little room to maneuver themselves out of the crisis. Though research reports have often indicated the desire of the urban African middle class to be involved in hometown activities, in reality, they desperately look for an escape route from simultaneous rural-urban involvement. This is not surprising as deep involvement in the affairs of the community costs money. On each visit, rural folks expect gifts in cash and in kind. The simultaneous involvement of elites in the rural and urban sphere, apart from straining them financially, exposes them to embezzlement which may have deleterious effects on social services provision. The problem of poverty is thereby compounded. It also has the potential of undermining tradition and political rights at the grassroots. Those who exert tremendous power in the urban space also desperately seek to line up the rural poor as clients.

Individuals may have different identities which can be simultaneously disclosed, but acting out the roles which flow from these identities may provoke a dilemma or even role nonperformance. Role nonperformance creates room for ineffective discharge of functions which may, in combination with other factors, promote poverty. Poverty remains severe in Africa as over half of the population live on less than one dollar a day.

The corruption of Africa's political elites has prevented the majority of its toiling masses from taking advantage of its rich resource endowment. This corruption arises in the context of conflicting pressure for resources from kinsmen and women. During research interviews, poor people have often openly argued that for them the democratization project is disconnected from their lived experiences what with dilapidated school buildings, unpaid salaries, pension and gratuities in the midst of acute sense of insecurity of lives and property as well as the epileptic infrastructural base. African leaders display open disdain for the ballot box and thus the wishes of the people. The elites simply assume that their money should deliver the votes. It is difficult to appreciate how democracy can work under conditions of widespread poverty and corruption, which in turn often precipitate intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic conflict by forcing multiple identities to the front burner of political competition.

Through whatever lens this is viewed, the simultaneous participation in the rural and the urban sphere takes time and money, it takes more of the time resources of the poor and the physical resources of the middle class. So is the simultaneous or sequential disclosure of identity. This may send contradictory signals. For effective democratization to take root, the people's elected representatives must be monitored but the individuals who are to monitor are also deeply involved in cult-related and intense religious activities which may entail night vigil, clapping, dancing and other forms of rituals and celebrations.

In the midst of the above, is it not surprising that there is any symbol of procedural if not substantive democracy in Africa? The absence of an overwhelming political apathy in Africa in the midst of multiple identities and their all encompassing expression really raises a major theoretical puzzle. There are some other relevant and pertinent issues about the future of democracy in Africa. In Africa, group ownership of land as the main economic resource is common. In fact, several years of capitalism had only begun to marginally erode groups' claim to land ownership and other viable resources. Theoretically, where a lineage or clan owns land, the exercise of individuals rights over such resources is constrained.

In Africa, individuals may exercise the usufruct rights in

property but not the right of alienation, and law courts have often affirmed the superiority of group rights in property over individual rights. This, no doubt is a fetter in the advancement of capitalism. Yet, liberal democracy can triumph better under conditions of advanced capitalism. The problems of insecurity of life and property, coupled with poor infrastructure have meant that people have to organize themselves in groups to agitate for and create access to better services. Many have learned to take their exit from the state (Osaghae, 1999). Group solidarity thereby gets strengthened. Individuals who enter into politics are expected to exploit their offices to project group rights by placing kith and kins in employment positions even over those with better qualifications. Successful politicians are expected to attract government patronage to the community. The success or failure of politicians is measured in these terms. How is this expectation compatible with the universal competitive claim of democracy on individual basis? The presence of rich mineral resources in fact offers a veritable platform for identity politics as communities are forced to form groups in order to be able to exert sufficient political leverage to obtain a desirable outcome. It is envisaged that had Nigeria's agricultural capitalism progressed, it might have recorded a more impressive outlook in its democratic path than it had been possible under oil rents which more than cocoa are more supportive of group claims and group pressure. Under commercial agriculture, land alienation and sales of labour power had commenced and these were becoming a common place. Really, labour-capital relations had then made some progress.

Thus fractured citizenship rather than common citizenship has become elevated. Nigeria's Constitutions in 1979 and 1999 had given the prime of place to what is referred to as the federal character which in essence project group rights and identities over those of individuals. Jinadu (2004:31-34) has documented several instances whereby fractured citizenship triumphed over common citizenship. To be appointed into high political offices, individuals are forced to mobilize the sponsorship of their ethnic or religious group or other forms of identity. Thus the liberal theory of the state has been argued to be fundamentally flawed because of its parochial, unificationist and assimilationist assumptions (Jinadu,

2004:12). The assumption by the liberal expectancy school that with capitalism and globalization, the features that separate one group from the other would disappear remains unfulfilled. The radical expectancy school has also failed in that social class affiliation is not exhaustive of identity formation. At some levels in some societies, social class differences are subsumed by other categories. The foregoing pose a serious theoretical challenge to scholars on Africa. In order to advance Africa's democratization, we may have to concede political rights to groups while simultaneously admitting of individual citizenship rights. In most of Africa, children are simultaneously born into groups and individual families. The rights which groups exercise over such children as individuals may be waning but they exist. When individuals die, the groups into which they were born largely bury them. If Africa's practice of democracy, and citizenship claims are to be sustainable and enduring, they must be anchored in the people's culture.

As much as possible, Africa must be supported to be itself in this age of democratization and globalization if the process of abridgement of rights is to be arrested. Inasmuch as the present practices of democracy are tantamount to dis-empowerment, they constitute a fetter on the exercise of citizenship rights. A veritable platform for political disenchantment thereby becomes feasible. The opening sentences of this paper by Kofi Annan and the 2004 Human Development Report bear testimony to the fluidity and elasticity of identities. The view that the end of history is here forecloses tolerance of individuals and groups who choose multiple identities.

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